

GENDER EQUITY IN THE RURAL SECONDARY CLASSROOM: THE EXPERIENCE OF
BEGINNING TEACHERS

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Need for this Work in the Literature	3
Context.....	4
Definition of Terms	5
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	8
Introduction to the Literature.....	8
Postpositivist/Empiricist Research	11
Qualitative Pragmatist Research.....	17
Postmodern Research	21
Critical Theorist Research	24
Conclusions of the Literature	30
Chapter 3: Methodology	32
Research Question	32
Conceptual Framework.....	33
Research Framework	34
Data Analysis.....	43
Ethical Considerations.....	44
Positionality	47
Limitations.....	47
Timeline.....	50
Conclusion	50
Chapter 4: Being a Beginning Teacher at a Rural School.....	51
Challenges of Teaching in a Rural School	51
Benefits of Teaching in a Rural School.....	60
Chapter 5: Teaching for Gender Equity	64
Rowdy Boys	64

The Compliant Buffer.....	66
Beyond Compliance: Recipients of Harassment	67
Academics: Unmotivated ‘Smart’ Boys and High-Achieving Girls	71
Teaching for Equity	72
Institutional Sexism	80
The Role of Teacher Preparation.....	87
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions	90
Summary of the Study	90
Summary of Findings with Interpretation	91
Discussion.....	97
What We Need to do to Teach Beginning Teachers How to Teach for Gender Equity in Rural Schools: Infused, From Theory to Practice	104
Discussion in Relation to the Literature	106
Future Research	107
Conclusion	109
References	110
Appendix A: Recruitment Email	117
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form.....	118
Appendix C: Interview Protocol.....	121
Appendix D: Themes Tables	122

Abstract

The secondary classroom is a place where girls and boys have very different experiences (Sadker, 2002; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008). This feminist, phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of beginning teachers in rural secondary schools, specifically regarding gender and gender equity in their classrooms. Ten first-year teachers in schools located in towns with populations smaller than 5,000 people were interviewed about their perceptions about gender equity, their role in maintaining an equitable classroom, and the impact of their preparation and the rural community on their teaching.

Participants indicated the importance of community in their rural schools. In most cases, they found the community to be positive and supportive. When that was not the case, participants reported a more negative experience. Participants noted multiple challenges to teaching in rural schools, especially a high workload, but were overall happy with their positions. All participants expressed a disposition towards valuing and helping all students, regardless of gender or gender identity. Most participants did not exhibit a critical awareness of gender bias. This, combined with their high workload, prevented them from implementing gender equity practices.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Today's female students can, because of their gender, expect to face inequities both in and outside of the classroom (Sadker, 2002). Their teachers, often unknowingly, participate in practices that maintain gender bias (Shumow & Schmidt, 2013; Sadker & Zittleman, 2005), yet gender equity is not an issue that is emphasized in teacher preparation (Sanders, 2003). To understand the context of this further, this feminist, phenomenological study explored the beginning teacher's perspectives and experiences concerning gender in the classroom, specifically in rural areas. Through semi-structured interviews with first-year teachers, I worked to gain this understanding. More specifically, I sought to learn whether these teachers were concerned about gender equity in the classroom, their understanding of the impact of forces such as a rural environment and the secondary classroom on gendered experiences, and whether, as beginning teachers, they felt prepared and able to provide an equitable classroom. I expected that, as being a beginning teacher is often very challenging, issues such as gender equity would not be my participants' highest priority, and that they would view their classes as largely equitable. However, I also anticipated that since gender issues are currently in the media, beginning teachers would be wrestling with ways to help their students consider these issues. My findings are meant to inform teacher preparation programs about how best to prepare teachers to think critically about gender equity in their classrooms, reject deficit thinking about rural students and girls given their contextual knowledge, and act accordingly, even early in their careers.

At a time when sources such as the media are telling girls and women that they have it all, their experience actually portrays a different story (Douglas, 2010). Women continue to make less money than men (Douglas, 2010). They are less likely to major in the sciences than

men (Legewie & Diprete, 2014). Females are heavily underrepresented in media formats such as video games (Gittleson, 2014) and televised sports news (Center for Feminist Research, 2010).

These inequities do not disappear in the classroom. Schools, from their structure to their curriculum, reinforce gender equity issues (Pinar et al., 2008). Girls are not encouraged as much as their male counterparts to succeed in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields. They are also not as well-prepared (Zubrzycki, 2016). Teachers treat girls and boys differently (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005; Shumow & Schmidt, 2013). They underrate girls' ability in subjects such as math (Gunderson, Ramirez, Levine, & Beilock, 2012) and praise girls and boys differently (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005). These teacher actions have an impact on gender equity in the classroom; teacher behaviors even as small as grouping by gender can result in an emphasis on, and creation of, differences between groups (Sparks, 2012).

In the meantime, girls are given the message that feminism's work is over; they can have what they want to have and actually have a lot of power (Cairns, 2014; Douglas, 2010). Part of this message equates this girl power with materialism and sexualization. Adolescent girls are given media messages that self-objectification is a means of empowerment (Douglas, 2010). Simultaneously, teachers use dress and behavior as a means to police their female students. Girls are held responsible not only for their own sexuality, but also for that of their male peers in the classroom (Rahimi & Liston, 2009).

It is possible that these problems are exacerbated in the rural classroom. Girls in rural areas have been found to have a self-concept that is lower than that of boys (Jones, Irvin, & Kibe, 2012; Puskar, Bernardo, Ren, Haley, Tark, Switala, & Siemon, 2010). In general, students who are marginalized appear, according to self-report, to struggle more in rural areas than in urban ones (Jones, Irvin, & Kibe, 2012; Puskar et al., 2010; Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull, 2015).

This issue affects many of our students; twenty percent of students in the United States attend rural schools (Graham, 2009).

Since teachers have the potential to substantially impact gender issues in the classroom (Sparks, 2012), it is imperative that we prepare them to teach for gender equity, particularly in the rural classroom. However, teacher education programs do not always follow best practices in multicultural education (Vavrus, 2010; Locke, 2004). Additionally, some preservice teachers who go on to teach in rural areas report feeling unprepared for the rural aspects of their jobs (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Kline & Walker-Gibbs 2015).

Need for this Work in the Literature

The literature needs to be strengthened concerning the preparation of teachers for gender equity in rural areas. There is little exploring the experiences of new teachers in rural areas and preservice teachers who want to teach in rural schools (Burton & Johnson, 2010) as well as the preparation of teachers for rural schools (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Blanks, Robbins, Rose, Beasley, Greene, Kile, & Broadus, 2013; Burton & Johnson, 2010). Some work has been done about the impact of a rural practicum placement on student teachers' perceptions of the rural and propensity for teaching in rural areas. These studies note that a key piece of rural placements and potential rural employment is to help student teachers get to know rural contexts and locations (Eppley, 2015).

In general, educational research rarely addresses rural areas (Tieken, 2014). Girls' studies have made large contributions to the literature on gender equity, particularly concerning the concept of girl power. However, these studies have been largely done in an urban context (Cairns, 2014). Additionally, gender equity lags behind other multicultural issues in teacher education curriculum development (Sanders, 2003). This study explored the nexus of these three

topics – beginning educators, rural context, and gender equity – and, in so doing, has the potential to contribute new concepts to the literature.

Context

My work as a feminist teacher educator allows me proximity to a range of schools, several of them rural. I am privileged to have the opportunity to see these institutions on multiple levels, from the hallways to the lunchroom to the classroom. As has been found in the literature, these schools and communities are often subject to deficit thinking, but have multiple strengths (Masinire, Meringe, & Nkambule, 2014).

My role as a teacher in the college classroom also informs my research. As my students and I learn about equity issues, including gender issues, they bring their experiences both as students and in their new roles as student teachers to classroom discussion. These students may be very committed to teaching for equity. However, they have to balance this commitment with the many other demands on their time and expectations for their teaching. This is not unusual; preservice teachers are often under a lot of stress, requiring teacher educators to provide flexibility and support. However, these support elements must also be paired with high expectations (Locke, 2004). Those high expectations need to include expectations about teaching for social justice, including in the area of gender equity.

Given that teachers have an impact on gender equity issues in the classroom (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005), this research seeks to address gaps in the literature about this issue from the perspective of teachers. By learning about their concerns, perceptions, and experiences, I sought to understand their preparation for and dispositions concerning gender issues in the rural classroom. I expect that this information will be useful to the field of teacher preparation. The study's focus on application in context shed light on which preservice experiences best prepared

beginning teachers to teach for gender equity in the field. It also explored types of preparation these teachers wish they had had, elements of teaching for equity that they were unaware that they lacked, and their perceptions of the climate of their rural schools.

Definition of Terms

This study relies on a number of parameters that might reasonably have different definitions. Therefore, it is key to define them so that both my readers and I can fully understand the phenomenon that is the focus of the research. These definitions also helped me in selection of participants and settings.

Defining rural. It is important to define what constitutes a rural area for the purposes of this study, because this research worked to isolate a particular phenomenon, which relies on a rural context. That said, it is important not to assume that rural areas are monolithic. As Tieken (2014) found in her study of two rural schools in Arkansas, rural towns that may look similar in terms of size can be very different. This diversity within rural areas is welcomed, but it is important that the study remain rural.

The term rural can be defined in multiple ways. Kline and Walker-Gibbs (2015) determined a community to be rural if it both was a certain distance from the nearest urban center and was also culturally constructed as rural. Additionally, they stated that “Rural areas are those where physical road distance results in pronounced restricted access to the full range of goods and services and social interaction” (p. 69). Masinire, Meringe, & Nkambule (2014) share a technical definition of rural: “We define rural as space which sustains human existence and development outside the jurisdiction of metropolitan/city/town authority” (p. 148). Anderson and Chang (2011) consider rural communities to be those that have a population of less than 2,500; however, they group rural with small town, which is a community of less than 25,000 that

is not near a metropolitan area. Rural areas can be further categorized; Azano and Stewart (2015) noted that there are fringe, distant, and remote rural communities.

Masinire, Meringe, & Nkambule (2014) look even further into the social construction of the rural, noting that in South African teacher education discourse, rural and urban communities have become a binary, and rural communities are seen as having deficits. Blanks et al. (2013) and Azano and Stewart (2016) also found this perception in the rural United States.

For the purposes of this research, rural was defined both technically and conceptually; a school was considered rural if it was in a town with 5,000 or fewer residents (although the school could also draw from other communities, which added together could have had a population of more than 5,000) and is generally conceptualized as rural.

Beginning teachers. It is also important to define who will qualify as a beginning teacher. Because I am hoping to inform teacher preparation practices, my participants needed to recently engaged in their preservice experience. For the purposes of this study, beginning teachers were all teachers in their first year of teaching or in the summer after that year.

Gender. It is common to equate gender with sex, and in most cases, a person expresses the gender of his or her sex. However, this is not true in all cases, such as with people who are transgender or intersex; therefore, gender is defined differently than sex. Individuals have a gender identity, which may or may not be the same as their biological sex. Gender is socially constructed (Wood, 2015). Research itself has a history of bias towards gender essentialism, with studies that show innate differences between women and men receiving more attention and support than those that do not (McHugh, 2014). However, many people see themselves on a gender spectrum, and thinking of gender in this way is an increasingly common construct (Sadker & Koch, 2016). Because this study is focused on gender equity, a definition of gender

and an understanding of what gender people identify as is key, particularly in conversations about teacher behaviors and student outcomes. For the purposes of this study, gender will be defined as the expression of an individual which may be male, female, or a gender expression that does not conform to that binary.

Gender equity. Equity and equality are terms that are frequently used interchangeably. One possible way to think of the term equity is to align it with justice (Espinoza, 2007). That is the way equity is defined for the purposes of this study. Equity, for the purposes of this study, is a practice that recognizes the hegemonic forces in our society that result in systemic inequality. Gender equity practices include looking critically at the historic and current oppression of girls, women and LGBTQ individuals as well as the effects of toxic masculinity on boys and men. Practitioners of gender equity then strive to provide justice, using strategies that actively support all students.

Given these parameters, I located ten participants who were first-year teachers in rural schools. I interviewed these teachers for the purpose of understanding their perceptions regarding teaching for gender equity in their rural schools. Specifically, I was endeavoring to understand how well-prepared they were to address gender issues in a rural environment.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This research focused on the experience of beginning teachers in rural settings, with an emphasis on their preparation and experience relating to gender equity in the K-12 classroom. Therefore, the following review of the literature surveys existing work in these intersecting areas. I begin the review with an overview of literature documenting problems concerning gender equity in the classroom. This overview includes classroom and school practices that result in different experiences based on gender. Next, I outline inequitable outcomes faced by girls and women.

I then look at gender equity, rural contexts, and beginning teachers from the perspective of four different theoretical frameworks encountered regularly in the literature. Researchers have looked at the issues of preservice preparation, gender equity, and rural schools from a variety of perspectives, which result in different methodologies and methods. I chose to focus on empirical research, pragmatic research, postmodern research, and critical theorist research, to outline the information provided by each of these schools of thought to the body of literature. In so doing, I am able to look at the problem from various perspectives and to see how these lenses uncover issues differently, but also report commonalities. This review informs my work broadly, gathering information from both the center and the edges of these traditions, and focusing on issues that come up in multiple traditions and contexts, rendering them important, if not essential. These issues, and the practices and theories that the authors of various traditions have shared, informed my conceptual framework.

Introduction to the Literature

Throughout their lives, boys and girls are given different messages about who they are, who they can be, and how they should behave (Owens, Smothers, & Love, 2003; Douglas,

2010). Schools are no exception to these differential experiences. Teachers treat girls differently than boys, calling on boys more frequently but also punishing girls less (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005). Both teachers and parents expect boys to be better at math than girls, and these beliefs have been found to impact students (Gunderson, Ramirez, Levine, & Beilock, 2012). As they get older, there is evidence that girls who may have once excelled in science courses become less visible and conform to gender stereotypes (Carlone, Johnson, & Scott, 2015). School space is even used differently; in some instances girls have access to less playground space and are kept from meaningful participation in sports games that use most of the playground territory (Paechter & Clark, 2007). Both genders face sexual harassment, but girls experience it more frequently (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005). School dress codes tend to target girls more than boys and contain the message that girls are responsible for keeping boys from being distracted through their dress (Raby, 2010).

The above elements of school are examples of hidden curriculum as described by Henderson and Gornik (2007). The hidden curriculum is not directly taught; however, students still learn its elements in school. Hidden curriculum can be taught through materials, which convey values in a covert way (Eisner, 2002). For example, schools often assign novels that portray traditional gender roles (Pinar et al, 2008). Hidden curriculum can also be taught through institutional structures; for example, students see more men in leadership roles than women in their elementary schools (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005). The actions of individuals, particularly teachers, also convey messages that are unspoken but learned. Teachers give boys more attention, particularly when calling on students (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005; Shumow & Schmidt, 2013). Also, they are more likely to give girls positive attention for being neat. While

these are most likely not conscious choices made by teachers, they result in differential treatment (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005).

Not surprisingly, the resulting outcomes for girls are different from that of boys. Women continue to make much less money than men, with white women earning 75 cents in comparison to every dollar a man makes, and women of color earning even less (Douglas, 2010). Inequities persist, particularly in the sciences. Women are less likely to major in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines than men (Legewie & Diprete, 2014). African American girls, in particular, are often tracked out of upper-level science courses, making it less likely that they will be drawn to science in college (Farinde & Lewis, 2012).

Girls in rural areas face additional obstacles. This population is not attaining the same educational outcomes as their peers in other areas. For example, rural students are less likely to attend college than their suburban and urban counterparts (Mader, 2014). There are specific gender differences in the rural school experience as well; research has found that rural girls have a lower self-concept than rural boys (Jones, Irvin, & Kibe, 2012; Puskar et al., 2010).

Teachers have the potential to impact student experiences, and possibly outcomes, in relation to gender equity. Therefore, an understanding of how best to prepare preservice teachers for equity work in rural schools is relevant to creating this type of change. Such preparation needs to take into account the dispositions and experiences of preservice teachers; preservice teachers themselves hold biases about the abilities of girls (Nürnberg, Schmitz, Keller & Sütterlin, 2016) as well as deficit views of the rural (Azano & Stewart, 2015).

Authors have looked at the issues of gender equity in rural education and preparation for preservice teachers to challenge equity issues from a number of theoretical lenses. Feminist research, perhaps unlike some other frameworks, is known to draw regularly from a variety of

theoretical frameworks and methodologies (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, not all of the research in this field is necessarily feminist research. I have organized the literature into the following theoretical approaches: postpositivist research, also called empiricist by McHugh (2014); pragmatic research; postmodern research; and critical theorist research. These approaches have overlapping philosophies, methods, and certainly aims.

Additionally, when possible, I note literature within the approaches that address minority status such as race or LGBTQ status. Understanding the intersectionality of gender with other identities such as these is important. It helps us recognize that no group is truly monolithic as well as that different identities have different social impacts, and the combination of these affect an individual (Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013).

Postpositivist/Empiricist Research

Feminism is often associated with qualitative methods, because feminist researchers find it important to value context. In fact, many feminists argue that experimental research in particular has often generalized the male experience to all humans. Another critique is that such research has looked at women through a male researcher's lens (McHugh, 2014). In contrast, feminist researchers do not want to objectify participants (Creswell, 2013).

However, many feminists also value quantitative, empiricist work. Some see this work as a way to reduce bias in postpositivist research; they recognize that bias exists in scientific research, but believe that it can be eliminated. These researchers engage in empiricist research to produce objective evidence of equal abilities in women and men (McHugh, 2014).

Postpositivist/empiricist researchers have investigated issues of preservice education for gender equity in rural schools by looking at the impact of stereotype threat on students via controlled experimental studies. Other work is centered around survey research and can be

divided into two general categories: students' perceptions of themselves and their situations, and teachers' perceptions concerning gender and rural environments.

Stereotype threat. Feminist empiricist work can show the possible influence of hidden curriculum on students. Good, Woodzicka, and Wingfield (2010) found that female students performed better on a test of chemistry comprehension when the material was accompanied with images that depicted women as scientists than when only males were depicted in the accompanying images. Similarly, female students do significantly better on Advanced Placement Calculus exams when asked to complete demographic information, including gender, after taking the exam rather than before (Danaher & Crandall, 2008).

K-12 Student perceptions. Many studies looked at K-12 student self-perceptions of their self-esteem, abilities, experiences, and interest. These studies, generally with large participant populations, found a variety of interesting results, particularly in relation to gender and geographic location. There is some empiricist evidence that marginalized students in rural areas face more adversity and have a lower self-concept than those in urban areas (Jones, Irvin, & Kibe, 2012; Puskar et al., 2010; Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull, 2015).

Girls are often shown to have lower self-confidence than boys. Shumow and Schmidt's (2013) study of several high school science classrooms found that while girls had slightly higher achievement, they rated their competence in science lower than boys did. Jones, Irvin, and Kibe (2012) studied already existing data from a longitudinal study and looked specifically at perceptions and math scores for African American adolescents. They found no difference in math achievement between groups based on gender or the geographic settings of rural, urban, and suburban. Girls reported a higher perception of their friends' academic commitment than boys did in every geographical area. In urban areas, gender perception of math ability was equal.

In contrast, “(f)or rural and suburban students, males reported higher math self-concept than female students” (Jones, Irvin, & Kibe, 2012, p. 327). Higher math achievement correlated with higher socioeconomic status in all groups.

Low self-esteem concerning math in rural areas is not limited to African American girls. Adolescent girls’ lower self-concept in rural areas was also noted in a study by Puskar, et al. (2010). This study, of predominantly Caucasian children, also analyzed survey data. The girls’ lower self esteem was paired with lower optimism.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LBGTQ) youth also have differentially negative experiences in rural areas. Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull (2015) found that rural LBGT students face more victimization than their urban peers when they are out (open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity); however, they are out at the same rate as urban students. Students who were out at school reported being recipients of a higher rate of bullying, but they also had a higher self esteem than their LBGT peers who were not out. Unfortunately, higher rates of victimization were associated with lower academic achievement. This indicates that schools need to better support their LBGT students (Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull, 2015).

Students also report a change in interest in some academic areas as they get older (Sorge, 2007; George, 2000). Sorge (2007) found that boys and girls had the same attitudes towards science between the ages of nine and fourteen. However, for both genders, interest dropped significantly between the ages of 11 and 12, the age of transition to middle school for these students. George (2000) found a similar drop in math interest in an earlier study of existing data, but the drop was around grades eight and nine.

There are some potential interventions to combat this drop in interest in science. Naizer, Hawthorne, and Henley (2014) found that engagement in a summer STEM program with follow-up sessions during the academic year not only increased student interest in STEM disciplines, but also narrowed the gender gap in interest. Technology and games may also be effective. Chang, Evans, Kim, Norton, and Samur (2015) conducted a study of rural middle school students in which participants who learned math using a computer game did better than those in the paper and pencil control. The effect was greatest for students in an inclusion classroom.

Teacher perceptions and actions. Postpositivist researchers have also looked into the perceptions that teachers have concerning student participation and ability, particularly in relation to math and science, as well as teacher behavior. There is some disagreement about this in the literature. Generally, studies show subtle gender bias.

One possible benefit of quantitative, postpositivist research is that data can be re-analyzed. In an article that is a reply to a previous study and that illustrates the multiple realities that exist even in the world of postpositivist research, Robinson-Cimpian, Lubienski, Ganley, & Copur-Gencturk (2014) provide an analysis of a large data set that differs from some other analyses of the same data. They discuss quasi-experimental work, and conclude that their analysis of the data shows that teachers underrate girls' math ability. Robinson-Cimpian et al. (2014) noted that specifically, when girls do as well as boys on tests and behave the same way, teachers rate them lower than boys. Girls may have to consistently be non-disruptive, engaged in material, and as good on math tests to earn the same ratings from teachers as boys do. Teachers also can falsely believe that there is equal gender participation in their classrooms (Shumow & Schmidt, 2013).

Preservice teachers also may come to the profession with gender bias. When asked to imagine themselves as advisors to families concerning students' next steps, preservice teachers in Germany were more likely to recommend that girls take a humanities path and that boys go on into math and science. Their decisions were based on short descriptions of students, including ability in math and German (Nürnberg et al., 2016).

These findings of teacher perceptions, while a useful contribution to the literature, are not new (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005; Owens, Smothers, & Love, 2003). Teacher perceptions surely come from a number of sources. If an analysis of teacher education textbooks is any indication, preservice education is not doing enough to help teachers think critically about their subtle biases. In their review of multiple teacher education textbooks, Zittleman and Sadker (2002) found little treatment of gender; only 3.3% of space was dedicated to gender issues. Even foundations of education texts, which are often for courses meant to teach about diversity, only spent 7.3% of the space on gender issues. Interestingly, the texts featured females more than males in photographs, at a two to one ratio.

Teacher perceptions can translate into teacher actions. Shumow and Schmidt (2013) found in a study of 13 high school science teachers that these teachers spoke, proportionately, 39% more with boys than girls in the class. Teachers spoke with males more in multiple categories of talk, including presentation of content and classroom management.

For some girls, gender bias is not the only bias that impacts their treatment from teachers. An identity with multiple minority statuses can result in multiple negative impacts. Intersectionality theory suggests that combination of impacts is not just an additive burden, but rather a combination with unique, inseparable effects (Parent, DeBlarer, & Moradi, 2013). Therefore, a postpositivist look at race and LGBTQ status enriches this discussion.

Gender is often discussed in the context of white girls and women, and race is often discussed in the context of African American men. Because of this, African American women are not as visible in research. Additionally, since African American females are perceived as achieving more than African American males, they have not been the focus of concern (Farinde & Lewis, 2012). A recent counterexample to this is Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda's (2015) report, entitled *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected*. This work is an analysis of Department of Education and other data in New York and Boston. In their work, Crenshaw et al. (2015) found that African American girls were six times as likely to be suspended as white girls. This information may be surprising because often, reports disaggregate male data but not female. This habit of ignoring subgroups among women is echoed (and perpetuated) by education textbooks, which tend to treat women as a singular group and do not often consider women of color and white women separately (Zittleman & Sadker, 2002).

Another area of research is preservice dispositions and preparation concerning gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Many preservice teachers have the desire to support their LGBTQ students and to combat the bullying that they endure (Milburn & Palladino, 2012). However, Milburn and Palladino (2012) found via their survey research that these students often lacked an understanding of the mental health impacts of LGBTQ status in the school climate and the existence of bullying regarding gender expression. Additionally, they struggled to understand how to incorporate these issues in their curricula and often have a deficit perspective towards their LGBTQ students (Horn et al., 2010). Still others were less supportive of LGBTQ issues, with a slightly more negative attitude towards gay males than lesbians (Wyatt, Oswalt, White, & Peterson, 2008). Preservice programs clearly need to do more to prepare

preservice teachers for LGBTQ students (Milburn & Palladino, 2012; Horn et al., 2010; Wyatt et al., 2008).

Addressing these biases at the preservice level may be challenging due to the stress that student teachers face. Caires, Almeida, and Martins (2010) surveyed preservice teachers near the beginning and the end of their student teaching experience. They found that, at the beginning, student teaching was overwhelming and stressful. In addition to the work involved, preservice teachers were dealing with the adjustment of becoming a professional. This improved over the course of the practicum, especially when individuals felt supported by their supervisors.

While there are feminist empiricist researchers, many feminist researchers are critical of postpositivist research. They question data that is taken out of context, since context is of high value to them. Since feminist researchers usually seek to value personal experience of participants, they often turn towards more qualitative methods (McHugh, 2014).

Qualitative Pragmatist Research

A number of studies in the literature do not identify theoretical frameworks or approaches as a part of their methodologies, or, if they do, identify frameworks that are more related to practice than to theory. The authors of these works are generally less concerned with placing themselves philosophically. Rather, they are more focused on the research question that they have developed and the best methods to answer that particular question. Among others, Dewey is associated with pragmatic philosophical views (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Pragmatism and feminism have many connections, and many feminist researchers have an appreciation for pragmatism. There are multiple reasons for this. “Among the features these feminist scholars point to as appealing are criticism of the positivist method; giving priority to political, cultural

and social issues; linking dominant discourses with domination; and striving for links between theory and praxis” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 25).

Being pragmatic does not mean that a researcher ignores concerns such as power dynamics, hegemonic discourses, or social concerns. These things are of importance to pragmatic researchers (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In fact, many of the studies in this section specifically mention these and other issues of social justice. However, they also are very concerned with a connection of theory to practice, another hallmark of pragmatism (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The studies in this area were focused on teaching, and fit into one of two categories: rural teaching and teaching for cultural competence.

Rural teaching. Research identified a number of different aspects to teaching, either as a student teacher or beginning teacher, in a rural area. One such aspect was the impact of living and working in a small community. Beginning teachers saw the benefits and drawbacks of a tight-knit community. Such communities can be very supportive (Burton & Johnson 2010; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015). However, it is not always easy to integrate oneself into such a community; Burton and Johnson (2010) found that understanding the multiple preexisting relationships in a tight-knit community might be one key to the success of a beginning rural teacher. Hellsten, McIntyre, & Prytula (2011) found that while those relationships were important, making connections outside of the rural community was important, too, to help prevent a sense of isolation.

Beginning teachers in small communities felt, in some ways, unprepared (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Kline & Walker-Gibbs 2015). Burton and Johnson’s study of two first-year teachers in the rural United States found that these teachers had felt somewhat alienated by teacher education programs that focused on preparation for suburban or urban environments

(Burton & Johnson, 2010). The participants in the study by Kline & Walker-Gibbs (2015) were also first-year teachers, located in remote rural Australia. They noted a lack of preparation for their specific environments, which required that they teach a wide range of subjects to fewer students, but also recognized that it would be a challenge for a preparation program to prepare for extremes. Possibly as a result, Kline and Walker-Gibbs (2015) found that in comparison with their peers in urban and regional areas, teachers in rural areas reported less effectiveness, and this increased with distance from urban areas.

One way to prepare preservice teachers for the rural environment is to place them there for their student teaching experience, allowing them to begin rural teaching with support. Kaden, Patterson, and Healy (2014) centered their theoretical framework around the contexts of rural places and tenets of student teacher supervision. This practical approach allowed them to design a phenomenological study that utilized multiple types of data gathered during 40 supervisory visits to 20 rural Alaskan student teaching placements. Every one of the placements was accessible only by plane or boat.

The placement of student teachers in these very remote rural environments produced stress for the preservice teacher as a result of living conditions and curricular resources, which varied a great deal. They also produced stress on supervisors due to travel and the need to work to understand multiple local contexts. However, the authors found that all involved agreed that in-person visits are a must, so that supervisors can understand the local communities and contexts in which preservice teachers are working, although virtual visits can be part of the overall supervision plan (Kaden, Patterson, and Healy, 2014). Additionally, the placement had many positives for students. Students gained from close relationships and the challenge of multiple subjects and ages.

Kaden and Patterson (2014) researched assessment practices of their science and math rural preservice teachers and compared them with those of their urban student teachers. All student teachers showed similar assessment strategies, and all student teachers changed their strategies similarly throughout the year. However, the rural student teachers increased the place-based nature of their strategies more than their urban counterparts. In the interviews paired with surveys in this mixed-methods study, rural preservice teachers showed significant growth in place-based practices.

Teaching in a rural environment can be isolating (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Kaden, Patterson, & Healy, 2014; Hellsten, McIntyre, & Prytula 2011; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015). This isolation can be professional; rural teachers at times desire more contact with other communities of professional practice to share techniques or resources (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Kaden, Patterson, & Healy, 2014; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015). The isolation can also be a challenge in other ways, such as socially (Kaden, Patterson, & Healy, 2014; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015).

Teaching for cultural competence. Other pragmatic research looked at the education of preservice and inservice teachers for cultural competence. Lundeberg (1997) videotaped a class discussion of preservice educators and asked students to estimate which gender dominated the discussion. Student chose equal airtime by gender or that women had dominated – only one student out of 48 thought men spoke more. In one section, men spoke more and in the other, women did. After the activity, students were overwhelmingly likely to recognize that, as teachers, simply intending to treat everyone the same does not work.

Towery (2007) focused his work on practicing teachers, all of whom were participants in a program designed to help them better teach for gender equity. Through analysis of transcripts

of semi-structured interviews, Towery found that some teachers noted growth in their own perceptions and in their teaching. Others identified themselves as already committed to teaching for equity. One clear outcome was many teachers' commitments to better supporting their LBGT students with safe spaces. There was also a lot of evidence of teachers who felt that their schools were mostly equitable for girls and boys. Given the media's portrayal of our larger society now being equal for women and girls (Douglas, 2010), this reaction is not surprising.

However, interviews with students contrasted a great deal with these teachers' conceptualizations. Although teachers did notice some evidence of sexual harassment, their observation was that the girls seemed to be okay with it, and this was evidence to them that a problem did not exist. Other teachers, however, when confronted with this evidence, became more committed to gender equity (Towery, 2007).

Postmodern Research

Many feminist researchers are also postmodernists. Although there are definite differences between postmodernism and poststructuralism, they also share elements and are often categorized together (Crotty, 1998). A postmodern perspective emphasizes multiple realities and is interested in language and discourse (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The postmodern research in this field focused either on the deficit perception of rural education or strategies for working with preservice teachers.

Deficit perspective of rural education. Two studies acknowledged the discourse of deficit thinking in conceptualizations of rural education. Masinire, Meringe, & Nkambule (2014) investigated the discourse of the deficit perspective of the rural and interviewed six principals, six teachers, and two school officials in rural areas. They found a lack of resources, a

scarcity of qualified teachers, stories of student dropout, and stories of teacher burnout. They suggest that teacher education focused on rural areas is one possible solution to these problems.

An example of teacher education focused on the rural is Azano and Stewart's (2015) work. Like Masinire, Meringe, & Nkambule (2014), Azano and Stewart (2015) were also committed to avoiding the discourse of deficit thinking about rural students. Additionally, they focused on the different realities experienced by various people. They studied the results of a questionnaire completed by four participants in rural student teaching placements. Azano and Stewart (2015) found that student teachers are often affected by the geographical location of their own school backgrounds. They also noted how relationships with students were easier to form in small, rural schools. These preservice teachers were taking place-based pedagogy courses, and they mentioned place as important in their planning, teaching, and development of community relationships.

Strategies for working with preservice teachers and transformational learning.

Three postmodern articles focused on promoting growth in preservice teachers. Gomez (2014) explored the experience of a preservice student of color with a postmodern view that looked at the "figured world of schools" (p. 48) and analyzed discourse practices. As this student, who had grown up in what she herself had termed a dysfunctional family, continued through the semester in an education course focused on diverse issues, she began to change her own perspective on her family life. She began to push back against a discourse of individualism and deficit thinking for her family and the students she tutored in her practicum experience, realizing that institutionalized inequity was a strong force in the lives of the marginalized.

Hargreaves & Jacka (1995) and Hopper (2000) considered the aspects of a postmodern view towards effective teaching practices and the relationship of such a view to preservice

student growth. Hopper (2000) used a repertory grid with physical education preservice teachers to help them think about teaching stances that have worked best for them as learners in the past. Through practice and reflection, Hopper found that student teachers developed a postmodern view on teaching knowledge. They were able to recognize the complexity and ever-changing nature of teaching through this process.

Hargreaves & Jacka (1995) noted the difficulty in effecting transformative learning with student teachers after they have spent years being socialized to traditional practices as students. They provided a case study of a teacher who maintained innovative teaching practices in her first year, even in the face of large obstacles. They suggested that teacher education programs need to consider how to help teachers both learn and maintain innovative practices while recognizing that school structures remain traditional.

Preservice programs are not the only factor in the transition from the preservice to the inservice teacher. There is some evidence that practicing teachers abandon the student-centered techniques that they learned in preservice programs and teach much as they were taught, in teacher-centered classrooms (Strom, 2015). A postmodern view recognizes the many factors and perspectives involved in a teacher's practice. Strom (2015) notes that preservice teacher preparation is just one factor in inservice practice. Other factors include classroom setting, students, class size, and whether a class is measured via standardized testing.

Brilhart (2010) also looked into the impact of preservice preparation on teacher practice. As a postmodernist, Brilhart presented the concept of a black box, which is at the crux of the issue but which cannot be seen entirely by the teacher participant or by the researcher. However, through interviews and observation, Brilhart noted two themes from preservice coursework that teachers found impactful, even years later: coursework that engaged preservice teachers as active

learners or teachers, and coursework that allowed them to apply facets of themselves, personally, to their work. This suggests that preservice programs should use both strategies in their work (Brilhart, 2010).

Critical Theorist Research

Critical theory is a theoretical framework that posits that so-called free societies are not truly free. Rather, they contain structural inequities, and these inequities must be problematized (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Critical theorists can use a variety of methods; in the literature on preservice education and gender equity in rural schools, the following types of methods were used: interviews, focus groups, text analysis, and action research.

Gender inequity in the secondary classroom. Rahimi and Liston (2009) critically examined school interactions to more fully understand gender inequity and its impacts. They identified with a stance on inequity as pervasive and omnipresent. In their study, Rahimi and Liston (2009) interviewed teachers from both urban and rural schools in the Southeastern United States. The teachers were mostly white, while many, if not the majority, of their students were students of color. The authors found that, although the teachers stated that they wanted gender equity in their classrooms, they appeared to be reinforcing inequitable conditions. The intersection of race, gender, and popular culture resulted in a disconnection between the teachers and students, with teachers perpetuating stereotypes about African American girls and sexuality.

Student dress was a common theme in Rahimi and Liston's (2009) work. Participants expressed concern about their female students' dress, wishing they were more chaste and less aggressive, while seeming to see male aggression as the norm. White participants also perpetuated stereotypes, particularly about African American girls and sexuality. Teachers

pointed to girls' clothing as evidence that they were sexually active, but did not come to those conclusions about the boys.

Additionally, teachers reported sexually harassing statements made to girls.

As the girls seem to *laugh off* a lot of the comments they hear from the male students, many of the teachers in this study construe this as acceptance by the female students and thus do not acknowledge and treat this as a form of sexual harassment. (Rahimi & Liston, 2009, p. 526)

Rahimi and Liston (2009) further describe that teachers acknowledged frequent use of slurs such as slut and deemed these as so common as to not be hurtful. This compares with Towery's findings; girls' efforts to be resilient in the face of harassment were read by teachers as evidence that the situation was not inequitable (Towery, 2007). Rahimi and Liston (2009) found, additionally, some evidence that teachers allowed use of these slurs to police the girls. This finding aligns with Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda's (2015) empirical finding that African American girls tend to be overpoliced by institutions.

Raby (2010) held several focus groups with students to understand their thinking about student dress and dress code. She found that students simultaneously recognized dress codes as sexist while reproducing some of that same sexism in their conversations. These secondary students were very judgmental towards girls who wore revealing clothing.

Carlone, Johnson, and Scott (2015) followed several girls in their science classes over a four-year span. They focused on one girl, and showed through the rich description of this focused case study how a girl can transform from being an exceptional science student to a student who exhibits helplessness and puts much of her energy into fitting in socially. Curricular structures and teacher actions contributed to this change.

Pervasive gender inequality has negative impacts on boys as well. Morris (2008)'s ethnographic study investigated the masculinization of boys at a rural school. To maintain a masculine identity, he found, boys eschewed academics while girls worked hard. This behavior, while contextually driven, had overall negative impacts on the lives of these boys in the larger context of a global economy. While he did not identify a theoretical framework, Morris's stance of seeking to problematize gender inequity and recognition of sexist practices that affected girls negatively even in the face of negative academic outcomes for boys aligns him with critical theory.

Critical theory in the preservice classroom. Given the structures described in the secondary classroom, critical theorists also want to explore the preservice classroom. These explorations include impacts of structural inequity on the preservice classroom itself as well as possible practices to prepare preservice teachers to themselves teach for equity.

Student teachers come to the preservice classroom with varying understanding and readiness for multicultural education. Evans-Winters and Hoff (2011) and Miretzky (2010) analyzed comments on course evaluations for early preservice courses that engaged students in discussions of diversity. In both cases, many students had negative reactions to the course and some even called the professors racist. Evans-Winters and Hoff (2011) explored the issue, using critical feminist and critical race theory, from the position of African American women at a predominantly white university. The two experienced professors analyzed instances of white preservice teachers' negative feedback. The authors concluded that some of their students were so used to their hegemonic privilege that they struggled with anti-racist education from professors of color.

Miretsky's (2010) experience was similar, although it came from the perspective of a white woman. Many of her students expressed that they felt compelled to take on her opinion or risk criticism. Miretsky went on to collect data on her colleagues' experiences, many of which were much more positive, and concluded that teaching multicultural education involves a choice between alienating students and reducing practices that challenge student assumptions.

Tinkler & Tinkler (2013) also found varying levels of transformative learning in preservice teachers taking a social foundations course. They collected data concerning a service-learning component that placed the preservice teachers in an environment with people unlike themselves. Many of the students gained a perspective and understanding of the need to develop cultural competence, but this varied widely, and some reacted negatively to challenges.

Location may also be a factor in preservice teachers' willingness to learn about difference and equity. Han, Madhuri, and Scull (2015) implemented curriculum that engaged their preservice teachers in learning about multiculturalism and social justice in literacy classroom in an urban and a rural university. They found that student teachers in a diverse urban area were much more open to this curriculum than a group of preservice teachers at a nearly entirely white, rural university. The rural student teachers did not have interest in incorporating diverse materials in their own teaching and complained about their incorporation in the university classroom.

Pairing experiential learning with collaborative reflection may be a beneficial strategy in work with preservice teachers. Ajayi (2014) used ideas of communities of practice in her research. Specifically, she drew from on the work of Freire and Giroux to engage herself and her students, who were 23 preservice teachers in a southern rural county in California, in critical pedagogy. She wanted her students to get to the point of affirming and honoring their K-12 rural

students' lives and community while also helping the K-12 students to "critically examine the circumstances of their own lives" (Ajayi, 2014, p. 255). Collaborative reflection was her main tool in doing this. To accomplish this work, she chose an action research methodology.

Preservice teachers worked in groups of four to practice critical reflection. She found that students were able to engage their students in K-12 projects that helped them reflect on their futures in the community, that preservice teachers were able to connect their teaching to local knowledge, that preservice teachers honored local knowledge, and learning was active in preservice classrooms. Like Masinire, Meringe, & Nkambule (2014), and Kaden, Patterson, & Healy (2014), Ajayi sees place-based education as a positive element of preservice education for rural areas.

It is possible that teacher education has not been positioned, due to policy and legacies of history, to itself model culturally relevant practices. Locke (2004) used critical theory to examine a teacher education program provided by a state university to Native American preservice teachers on a Native American reservation. He found that the European American structures of the program systematically did not recognize the historical and current context, resulting in a less effective program. In his analysis, Locke noted the importance of teacher educators' high expectations paired with flexible support.

There are other ways that educator preparation programs need to first hold themselves to account. Programs often do not model the practices that they would potentially hope their own students and alumni would implement. For example, programs themselves are not always welcoming of students who do not conform to traditional views of gender, sex, or sexual orientation. Horn et al. (2010) set out to effect change concerning social justice issues around LBGTQ students. Among other things, their group analyzed websites of teacher education

programs for signs of being welcoming to LGBTQ students and rated only one with an A (72% earned an F).

Additionally, preservice programs do not always model integrated, embedded multicultural education. Education preparation programs often make the mistake of placing multicultural issues within one course, which is not ideal (McDonough, 2009; Vavrus, 2010). Another issue is that multicultural educators can fall into the trap of having deficit thinking about their own student teachers' ability to teach for social justice (McDonough, 2009).

Despite these concerns, there are examples in critical theorist literature of teachers who are successfully implementing critical pedagogy (McDonough, 2009; Camp & Oesterreich, 2010; Bruce, Brown, Mellin McCracken, and Bell-Nolan, 2008). These case studies show that in the face of challenges such as lack of support from colleagues, teachers can and do work to provide culturally relevant teaching. For example, Bruce et al. (2008) used literature to engage students in discussions about historical and current cultural practices that result in gender inequity.

While, as postmodern authors showed, practicing teachers are influenced by a number of factors, one of those factors remains their preservice preparation:

Teacher education programs that provide authentic classroom experiences, unveil school cultures, and provide support for utilizing tools such as inquiry and constructivism as conduits for powerful learning experiences can offer schools uncommon teachers poised to release students from the binds of commonsense teaching. (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010, p. 26)

Conclusions of the Literature

A look at the literature through the lens of various methodological frameworks allows for an understanding of a broad range of study. Together, these research traditions paint a picture of gender equity issues in rural schools and the preservice teacher education programs that might serve them. Each type of research has value to the feminist teacher educator as she considers how best to support and prepare student teachers for a rural context.

In terms of gender equity, the four approaches show, from their various perspectives, that girls are not being treated equally in the classroom and face teacher bias (Rahimi & Liston, 2009; Carlone, Johnson, & Scott, 2015; Robinson-Cimpian et al., 2014; Nürnberger et al., 2016; Raby, 2010), although their teachers often do not recognize this (Towery, 2007). The relevance of this to my study is an understanding that beginning teachers may be socialized to see inequitable treatment as equitable.

The literature also addressed rural contexts. One key finding is that rural areas are often subject to a deficit view (Masinire, Meringe, & Nkambule, 2014; Azano & Stewart, 2015). Preservice teachers are often not prepared for rural environments (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Kline & Walker-Gibbs 2015), but when they student teach in rural areas, they gain skills in place-based education (Masinire, Meringe, & Nkambule, 2014; Kaden, Patterson, & Healy 2014; Ajayi 2014). These findings guide me in an exploration of my participants' views towards the rural and their perceptions of their preparation for rural areas.

Finally, the literature addressed preservice teacher preparation. Preservice teachers can be resistant to multicultural education (Han, Madhuri, & Scull, 2015; Miretzky, 2010; Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011). Additionally, their preparation programs are not always engaging in best practice in terms of preparation for diverse student populations (McDonough, 2009; Vavrus,

2010). An important factor to consider is that beginning teachers are undergoing difficult and stressful transitions (Caires et al., 2010). This closely relates to the current study, in that I will seek beginning teachers' thoughts on their preparation and how it might be improved.

In spite of the shortage of teachers in rural areas, there is a lack of literature concerning preparing preservice teachers for rural schools (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Blanks et al., 2013; Burton & Johnson, 2010). Rural environments pose both benefits and challenges to new teachers (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012). Additionally, gender inequity persists in the classroom, and teachers play a role in this (Rahimi & Liston, 2009; Carlone, Johnson, & Scott, 2015; Robinson-Cimpian et al., 2014). Clearly, more research in this area is required. As a result, I will focus my research on the experience of beginning teachers in rural areas with regards to gender equity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study is a feminist phenomenological investigation into the experience of beginning rural teachers with regard to gender issues in the classroom. To conduct the study, I employed the technique of semi-structured interviews with ten beginning teachers in rural schools. I interviewed all teachers at least once and nine of them twice. I transcribed all interviews and coded the data in the interview transcripts to come to an understanding of these teachers' perceptions and experiences.

In this chapter, I articulate my research question and other questions that stem from it. I then describe a conceptual framework derived from my review of the literature. Next, I delineate my research framework: epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods that arise from both my context, my beliefs, and the aims of my research. I talk about the relevance of the feminist approach and other approaches that informed my work.

Within the methods discussion, I outline the population of study and sampling method for determining participants, setting, instruments, and data collection and analysis techniques. I expand on these by discussing feminism more in-depth and acknowledging some other frameworks that informed my work. Once I have outlined this for the reader, I review the limitations and ethical considerations of my research, including a statement about my positionality. Finally, I share a timeline of my work.

Research Question

My research focused on how student teachers and first-year teachers (both fitting under the term beginning teachers) view gender equity in the classroom. My research question is the

following: How do beginning teachers perceive gender equity issues in the rural secondary classroom?

Secondarily, I sought to find answers to these sub-questions as well:

- How do these teachers characterize the gender dynamics in the secondary classroom?
- How do they perceive their roles as teachers with regards to achieving gender equity in the classroom?
- What are their perceptions of their preparation to teach for gender equity?
- What are their perceptions of their preparation to teach in rural areas?
- How do they characterize rural teaching?

Although there is much talk in the literature about recruitment and retention of teachers for rural schools, there is very little research or emphasis on preparing preservice teachers for rural areas (Blanks et al., 2013). This positioning ignores the fact that recruiting unprepared teachers is not a good long-term strategy (Azano & Stewart, 2015). Additionally, research concerning beginning teachers and gender equity, particularly in the rural environment, is rare. This study worked to address these gaps in the literature by learning about the experience of beginning teachers in rural areas.

Conceptual Framework

My review of the literature helped me to build my conceptual framework. The review establishes that girls face inequitable experiences in classrooms, and that teacher behavior can contribute to this (Rahimi & Liston, 2009; Raby, 2010; Carlone, Johnson, & Scott, 2015; Robinson-Cimpian et al., 2014; Nürnberger et al., 2016); therefore, I anticipated the potential for this occurring. Additionally, beginning teachers might not be well-prepared to teach for equity

(Vavrus, 2010) or in rural contexts (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Kline & Walker-Gibbs 2015).

Beginning teachers might resist education for equity, especially in rural areas (Han, Madhuri, & Scull, 2015), perhaps because they do not believe that conditions are inequitable (Towery, 2007).

All of these issues relate directly to my study.

Research Framework

In the following section, I outline the framework that informed my research. I begin with a description of my epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. In each case, I explain how these relate to my feminist approach as well as to my research.

Crotty (1998) suggests that researchers need to answer four questions to frame the philosophical and methodological foundations of their work. These questions ask the researcher to identify the epistemology of the research, the theoretical perspective through which this is informed, the methodology supported by this theoretical perspective, and the methods informed by that methodology.

Epistemology. I approach my research with what Crotty (1998) calls a constructionist epistemology. I believe that reality is constructed in an interaction between the subject and the object. As a natural scientist in addition to being a social scientist, I do not deny the existence of objects outside of human knowing. I firmly believe that objects existed long before humans did. However, epistemologically, I recognize that humans give those objects meaning. This pairing of a somewhat realist ontology and constructionist epistemology is compatible, according to Crotty (1998) and Maxwell (2013).

However, as a qualitative researcher, I needed to recognize that I would be engaging multiple realities (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). I know that my reality was different from that of my participants, and that their realities were different from one another. This is something I needed

to continually review and keep in mind; it is important for a feminist researcher to “engage in critical reflection on his or her epistemic commitments” (McHugh, 2014, p. 147).

Theoretical framework: A feminist approach. The constructionist epistemology does not necessarily dictate the remainder of my research course. “The logic that the qualitative researcher follows is inductive, from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer” (Creswell, 2013, p. 22). However, my constructionist epistemology, paired with my identity as a feminist, does inform my choices. Therefore, my theoretical perspective will be feminist.

Feminists seek to understand the perspective of the participants in their research (McHugh, 2014). As a feminist researcher seeking to understand the perspectives of my participants as described by McHugh (2014), I decided that I wanted to understand the experience of beginning teachers. Therefore, my research is centered around their voices.

Additionally, feminist researchers find the richness that a personal connection to an experience can bring in the form of a researcher. “Rather than bias data, acknowledging the researchers’ own experience explicitly including their perspectives in the research process may serve to further ground feminist research in lived experience” (Yost & Chmielewski, 2013, p. 249). Therefore, my personal connection to this topic as a former high school science and math teacher and current preservice teacher educator is highly relevant to this question and was a benefit as I embarked on my research; personal connections can be positive in feminist research (McHugh, 2014).

My research was also informed by the way in which I view myself as a feminist. Crotty (1998) describes multiple types of feminism, including liberal feminists, who emphasize individualism; Marxist feminists, who emphasize the impact of capitalism; and radical feminists,

who believe that women always have been and will be oppressed in a world that contains men. One commonality to these feminisms is that they all agree that women face inequitable conditions in comparison with men and therefore work to decrease that inequity.

Like feminists who identify themselves in one of the categories above, I assert that women face oppression and therefore I must work towards gender equity. Additionally, my feminist views draw from ecofeminism, which extends the concept of an ecosystem to human contexts (Mack-Canty, 2004). I see care for nature and a view of the world, and classrooms, as interconnected. I am drawn to these ideas by a love of nature and a commitment to equity.

Unlike some ecofeminists, I am not a gender essentialist. I agree with Crotty (1998) that while biology is real, a treatment of femininity as a production of biology rather than society ignores history. My ecofeminism is of a pragmatic type; care for our world is important for our survival, and degradation of our world is going to negatively impact our lives, particularly the lives of the most marginalized of us (Li, 2007). This categorization of my feminism informed my conceptual framework.

One criticism of ecofeminism is that it can become a “cultural escapism for a privileged Western female elite” (Ruether, 1997, p. 78). However, it can also be a lens through which various hierarchies, involving race and class, are viewed (Ruether, 1997). It is this second conceptualization that I hope I embrace as an ecofeminist. As a researcher, it was my intent that ecofeminism would help me to value place, particularly rural spaces, and work towards change with regards to equity issues.

One purpose of this work is to begin to uncover obstacles in the way of students who, because of hegemonic ideas about girls and femininity as well as boys and masculinity, race, sexual orientation, and sexual identity cannot be themselves. Maxine Greene (1988) talks about

obstacles that could contribute to this in *The Dialectic of Freedom*. These obstacles, she says, are “the limits, internal and external, experienced by restless, preoccupied, rebellious women...the discrimination and inequitable circumstances faced by the minority group member; the artificial barriers erected in the way of children trying to create authentic selves” (Greene, 1988, p. 9).

Other theoretical approaches that informed my work. In discussing my theoretical framework, I think it is important to touch upon other approaches that I see as closely related. Although I did not intentionally expect to use these approaches, I have learned from them, and they continue to inform my work. One such approach is critical theory. Critical theory resists definition because it is frequently changing, and the field contains multiple perspectives concerning what critical theory is (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). “In this context, a reconceptualized critical theory questions the assumption that societies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the nations of the European Union, for example, are unproblematically democratic and free” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 303). In a school setting, this translates into structural inequities that advantage some, necessarily disadvantaging others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Critical theory is an approach that is very closely related to my work. In fact, one might say that in problematizing the current discourse, I am working in the realm of critical feminist theory. Feminist, anti-racist, and Marxist approaches are often compatible with critical research (Bhavani, Chua, & Collins, 2014). Like a critical theorist does, I see social dynamics in terms of power differentials; rather than looking for inequity, I assume it is there because it is a part of the hegemonic structure of our society. I hope that my research will lead to action that will reduce inequities. These things are also associated with critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005).

Postmodernism is another approach that has informed my thinking and my work. Noddings (2007) recognizes some commonalities between feminist and postmodern philosophies: “In agreement with postmodernists, some feminists reject most claims to universality, the traditional notion of objectivity, the search for universal truth and certainty, and the creation and use of ‘grand narratives’” (p. 217). Postmodernism also pays attention to the stories of people and groups (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). As researchers who want to showcase the voice of research participants, feminist researchers might resonate with that as well. It is, in fact, common for feminist research to also be postmodern (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, as Noddings notes, there are parts of postmodernism that are difficult for feminists to reconcile. For example, to eliminate the possibility of the subject is challenging to feminist women who find, just as we recognize our “subjecthood” (Noddings, 2007, p. 218), that the concept is being taken away.

Although I do not claim postmodernism as part of my theoretical framework, it certainly informed my work. Postmodernists believe that all research “is socially produced and therefore can never be value free” (McHugh, 2014, p. 143). I agree with this; as a researcher, I need to recognize my biases rather than work under the illusion that I can eliminate them.

In conducting research from a feminist standpoint as defined by Crotty (1998), I recognized that my research was different from other research. Why is this true? I recognize that as a woman, I have a certain privilege that many straight white men do not; I have the experience of being an outsider to male-dominated culture and therefore able to see some things that they may not (McHugh, 2014). This experience informed my research.

McHugh (2014) identifies feminist standpoint as a type of epistemology. Although I recognize and respect a standpoint epistemology, I choose not to claim feminist standpoint as my

epistemology. This choice is both a reflection of my personal epistemic beliefs and also a result of my recognition that, if my way of knowing is dependent on my position as a woman, I may not be as likely to recognize the multiple other ways in which I have privilege and benefit from hegemony. My race, sexuality, cis-genderedness, and social class are all also part of my identity. If I assume that I can know things because of my gender, and claim this as my central way of knowing, it might interfere with an understanding of the multiple other intersectionalities that impact the lives of my participants and their students. This does not have to be the case; according to Oleson (2005), there are many different types of standpoint feminism. Therefore, I draw from my feminist standpoint, but I see this an important element of my theoretical perspective rather than my epistemology.

A feminist theoretical perspective does not necessarily insist on the use of specifically feminist methodologies (Crotty, 1998). Multiple methodologies are compatible with feminism (Creswell, 2013; Reinharz, 1992). Therefore, my research infused feminism into my chosen methodology.

Methodology. Because I wanted to understand the experience of beginning teachers in rural schools, the methodology that I used was phenomenology. Edmund Husserl is known as the progenitor of many of the ideas behind phenomenology; these ideas have since been expanded upon by many others (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology involves “a (paradigm) shift from observed behaviors to the importance of an individual’s lived experience...” (McHugh, 2014, p. 153). A phenomenological study focuses on a group of people who have an experience in common (Creswell, 2013). In the case of this research, the common experience was that of being a beginning teacher in a rural classroom.

Philosophy is an important element in phenomenology. Phenomenologists base their work on a philosophical belief that the researcher should suspend any preconceptions about reality concerning the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). They also push back against the definition of the subject and object as two distinct things (McHugh, 2014; Creswell, 2013). As a result, rather than trying to test a hypothesis, the phenomenological researcher works to describe experience. Through this description, the researcher will form theory based on the data. The researcher, especially a feminist phenomenological researcher, will also highly value context. The importance of the context is to help identify when differences are a result of context as opposed to an essential element of gender (McHugh, 2014).

There are many ways in which phenomenology is compatible with a feminist theoretical framework. Both phenomenology and feminism value context. Both also value the voice of the participant. Additionally, both recognize that the researcher and participant are engaging in dialog (McHugh, 2014).

Methods: Participants, sampling, and setting. I define beginning teachers as teachers in their first year of teaching or the summer afterward. I chose to work with this population because I believed this population would help me answer my research questions in the context of improving teacher education. Each of my participants was a first-year teacher in a rural area. The criteria that I employed for this study was to define a rural teacher as a teacher at a school in a town with a population under 5,000, although the school might have attendees from a wider area than simply the township. This definition was influenced by Graham (2009), who defined a rural community as one that is outside of an urban or urban cluster area, the smallest of which would have a population of 25,000.

Creswell (2013) suggests that phenomenological studies, which are centered around a group of people, should involve between three and fifteen participants. The group should also be heterogeneous. Over the course of eight months, I recruited ten first-year teachers to participate in my study. Because this study is a phenomenological study, seeking to learn about the experience of beginning teachers in a specific situation, I used criterion sampling as described by Creswell (2013). To recruit participants, I emailed a prepared script (see Appendix A) to hundreds of potential participants. I then met with potential participants to review the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) and conduct the first interview.

I interviewed participants in coffee shops, libraries, restaurants, and in an apartment. Participants came from two Midwestern states. The farthest two participants were 200 miles from one another. Below is a chart with information about my participants:

Participant (pseudonyms used)	Gender	Subject Area	Grades Taught
Sara	F	Art	9-12
Kristie	F	Science	9-12
Troy	M	Math	8-12
Don	M	Spanish	6-8
Robyn	F	FACS	9-12
Chad	M	Math	9-11
Kyle	M	Math	10-12, AP
Julia	F	English	11& 12 + theatre elective
Hope	F	English	10 + AP
Jaycee	F	English	9+electives

Methods: Instruments and data collection. To understand the experiences of my participants, I employed semi-structured interviews. The instruments I used were myself, as the qualitative researcher, and my interview questions (see Appendix C). Semi-structured interviews helped me to understand the participants in my study, “their views, meanings, and

interpretations” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) while still allowing my interviews to have some consistency and focus on the phenomenon under study. I was able to ask follow-up questions based on participant responses while also being sure to ask many of the same questions of everyone.

Semi-structured interviews can be an effective method in feminist research (Reinharz, 1992; Yost & Chmielewski, 2013). Interviewing is a common method in feminist research because “(i)nterviewing offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of a researcher” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19). Through interviews, I reached for the feminist researcher’s goal of bringing to light experiences that might have previously been unknown (McHugh, 2014). To best do this, I worked to create a relationship with participants. Feminist interviewers tend to eschew detached interviewing styles, which can have the effect of treating participants mostly as sources of data (Reinharz, 1992). Some feminist researchers advocate for self-disclosure during interviews, with the interviewer speaking of shared experiences, for example (Reinharz, 1992).

One way that I hoped to create a relationship was to interview each participant at least twice. This happened in the case of every interviewee with the exception of one, who stopped communicating after we struggled to find a time that worked for her. More than one interview also allowed me to improve the accuracy of my data, because I was able to confirm things that participants said a second time, in what Lewis (2009) calls the “test-retest method” (p. 9).

During interviews, I used documents to elicit my participants’ thoughts about various topics. For example, I asked participants to look at their school’s dress code with me and convey their thoughts. Often, the dress code came up in conversation before I mentioned that I had

brought it. For one participant, Jaycee, I forgot to bring the dress code either time that I met with her.

After conducting some first interviews, I recognized that centering the conversation around the questions I chose kept the conversation closely tied to my values. I decided to ask my participants to name one to three things, either academic or not, that they felt it was important to help their students achieve or learn. This allowed more of my participants' values and other ideas to become more prominent in the data.

Data Analysis

I transcribed all interviews nearly verbatim, although some repeated words and verbal tics were not transcribed in keeping with Carlson's (2010) advice about member checking and keeping positive relationships. Transcribing the interviews myself allowed me to get a thorough first read of all data. While coding was a big part of my data analysis procedure, reading and re-reading transcripts and making connections as described by Maxwell (2013) was also an important element of my analysis.

I then imported all interviews to MaxQDA for the convenience of keeping track of my codes. I coded the data using Saldaña's (2016) version of descriptive coding. During and after my coding and re-coding the data, I organized codes into categories and arranged categories in a code map. This tool allowed me to look at relationships, arrange and re-arrange, as well as to see which codes were more salient (both in number and relationship). I found that I had 68 descriptive codes arranged into 19 categories. I then organized these categories into themes, which allowed me to develop arguments and a thesis (see Appendix D).

I then re-coded the data using a modified version of values coding as described by Saldaña (2016). I coded segments that showed participants' values, their beliefs, and their

opinions. Saldaña calls this final category attitudes, but I found the word opinion to more closely match the types of things I was coding in that way, and so the use of the word opinion was a modification that I made (see Appendix D).

To ensure high quality, I worked to provide thick description in my memos and journals, in order to give the reader a fuller sense of context (Carlson, 2010). I also kept a careful audit trail of my work. This included elements such as observation notes, memos, and interview transcripts, as suggested by Carlson (2010).

Ethical Considerations

Maxwell (2013) puts ethical considerations front and center: “I believe that ethical concerns should be involved in *every* aspect of design” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 7). As a feminist researcher, I share that belief. Throughout this study, it was essential for me to consider the impact of my research on my participants as well as future preservice educators and, by extension, K-12 students who might be impacted by my work.

Feminist researchers do not want to make their participants into objects and focus on this concern (Oleson, 2005). Some feminists also find the ethic of care to be central to their ethical frameworks. The ethic of care asks carers to consider the needs of others and care for them. This is not meant to put the carer in the position of not taking care of herself; self-care is part of the ethic of care. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that caring is done in relation (Noddings, 2007). Ecofeminists in particular can be drawn to an ethic of care (Zell, 1998). The ethic of care emphasizes connection to others, and, in an ecofeminist point of view, to the world (Zell, 1998).

As a qualitative researcher, it has been important, ethically, for me to recognize my own biases and values as I conduct the research (Creswell, 2013). These biases can affect multiple stages of the research, from participant selection to interviews to coding and writing. Bias is a

threat to trustworthiness, and since bias cannot be eliminated, I was certain to acknowledge and examine my biases as I conducted my research (Maxwell, 2013).

Choosing a group of people to study has ethical considerations of its own. Even research that does not appear to have any negative impact is a burden on participants. I was careful to consider the amount of burden and whether the research benefitted my participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I traveled to places that were convenient for them and did my best to show them that I valued their time and was grateful for their participation.

“Relationships with participants lie at the heart of feminist ethical concerns” (Oleson, 2005, p. 255). That being the case, it was important for me to consider how to recruit participants in a way that allowed them to refuse to be a part of the study, and to withdraw at any time that they would like, should they feel the need. To help with this, I did not recruit any of my current or former students.

Once a participant consented to be a part of the study, confidentiality was an ethical aspect to keep in mind. I used pseudonyms for my participants and kept all data secure either on a password-protected recording device, in a password-protected laptop, or in a locked cabinet. As a feminist researcher, I was clear about this and other details with my participants as outlined by Oleson (2005).

There are ethical considerations to keep in mind during interviews as well. One ethical element of feminist research is to scrutinize of the context of the research; considering these details is part of an ethical approach. For example, using this approach, as a feminist researcher I was very clear about data collection processes and materials and invited participant input concerning these to reduce as much as possible the distance between the researcher and the participant (Oleson, 2005).

Feminist researchers also need to be concerned about their own biases and their reactions to either feminist-leaning responses or responses which would appear to challenge the perspectives of the researcher (Oleson, 2005). Maxwell (2013) states that this reactivity is a threat to validity (trustworthiness). In interview research, it is impossible to have zero impact on the person being interviewed. Therefore, that was not the goal; the goal was to try to understand my impact as much as possible so that I could have that in mind as I considered the trustworthiness of my data.

Additionally, negotiating participant input on the final product is a complex ethical decision (Oleson, 2005). Member checks are a way to increase validity (Maxwell, 2013). However, they can backfire, to the point of a degradation of the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Carlson, 2010). Rather than use member checks, I used peer checking, asking my advisor to help me reflect on my data analysis and reduce personal bias (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007). I continually reflected on and looked for ways to increase the validity of my work.

One concern that I had about the connection of feminism to my research question is that of the perspective of my research participants. Feminist researchers have worked to bring to light the perspective of those who were under-researched, mostly women (McHugh, 2014). By choosing to interview secondary teachers, I am, in some cases, giving voice to men concerning the experiences of girls in their classroom. This risks not only strengthening the male voice but also accepting the male perspective in regards to female experience.

However, my goal in this research was to understand the perceptions of beginning teachers about gender equity in their classrooms. It is meant to bring out questions to inform future research as well as future practice regarding preservice educators. An understanding of

what beginning teachers see in terms of gender equity and conceptualize as their own role can inform preservice educators about ways to help beginning teachers, who will be both male and female, to problematize hegemonic structures in their classrooms and consider ways to disrupt the discourse of patriarchy.

Positionality

As a white, straight, cis-gendered woman, I recognize that I come from a position that may be different from that of some of my participants and their students. I am a former high school math and science teacher who now works to prepare preservice teachers. Additionally, I am a feminist.

This background means that I have ideas about what constitutes good teaching. I also have opinions about what types of strategies and content should be used to create as equitable a classroom as possible. To maintain awareness of these biases was important, and was something I continued to do throughout my study.

Limitations

One limitation of the feminist approach when applied to phenomenological methodology is bracketing. Creswell (2013) notes that a part of the work of the phenomenologist as a researcher is to bracket her experiences. The researcher should recognize what experiences she has had with the phenomenon and work to set them aside so that the experiences of the participants can truly be heard. This conflicts with the feminist belief that a personal connection to the topic of research is an asset; “(i)n feminist research, there is a realization that such connections cannot be removed, bracketed, or erased, but we do consider it important to reveal them” (McHugh, 2014, p. 145). Therefore, it was important for me to minimize this limitation of feminist research by making my experiences known to my readers so that they “can judge for

themselves whether the researcher focused solely on the participants' experiences in the description without bringing himself or herself into the picture" (Creswell, 2013, p. 79). This balance between using my experiences as an asset and not getting in the way of focusing on the experiences of my participants was, at times, a challenge.

Feminist research "puts gender at the center of one's inquiry" (McHugh, 2014, p. 137). Additionally, feminist research has the aim of addressing inequities and improving the lives of women (McHugh, 2014; Crotty, 1998). One potential problem with this view is that feminist researchers may see themselves as agents who are freeing others, rendering the participants and others affected by the research as passive recipients of this (McHugh, 2014). This is an attitude that I worked to avoid.

Feminist researchers work to truly hear, and make heard, the voices of those they research. Teachers are people who have not been heard a great deal in the past, but who have a lot of knowledge about their craft (Noddings, 2007). Feminist research has had an impact on research in the social sciences. For years, social science research was focused on men. Feminist research has worked to correct that imbalance, having an impact on multiple fields (McHugh, 2014). The emphasis on empowerment of participants can cause issues, however, when the researcher and participant disagree about interpretations; a relationship that is framed as equal does not leave much room for decision making when the two involved disagree (Riger, 1992).

As a qualitative, feminist researcher, I am well aware that a limitation of my research is that it is not generalizable (McHugh, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, it may have some transferability to the lives and situations of some readers. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) suggest that it is up to the reader to decide whether qualitative research transfers to her situation. To increase the transferability of my work, I tried to include as diverse a sample of participants

as possible, even within my stated parameters. I recruited four men and six women from a large area. They were very different people with different background. This way, the commonalities of experience that cut across multiple or all participants are more likely to exist elsewhere.

Thick description is another way to increase the transferability of my work; this description can more easily allow others to understand my context and see whether it applies to theirs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Carlson, 2010).

An important critique of feminism in general and feminist research in particular is the exclusion of women of color. Much feminist work has been focused on white, middle class women (Collins, 2009). White women have excluded Black women from the academy, particularly at the time that groundbreaking feminist work was being done. This limits the scope of the work, because it does not include Black women's experience of patriarchy. The result of this has been that much feminist thought has been constructed without a Black perspective (Collins, 2009). Additionally, much of the conversation about race in the United States is focused on Black and White. However, present in our society and educational systems are many more racial and/or ethnic groups, including people who identify as Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islanders, Middle Eastern, and Native American (Tatum, 2017).

Women of color have been major contributors to qualitative feminist work. One contribution is a problematization of how whiteness is constructed. Additionally, the intersectionality of race and gender positions black women in a particular standpoint for doing research (Oleson, 2005).

Although my participants were from a geographic area spanning 200 miles, they were also all from rural schools in the Midwest. All of my participants appeared to be white.

Therefore, I am cognizant that this study does not broaden feminist work to other races or ethnicities.

Timeline

I interviewed ten beginning teachers between March, 2017 and December, 2017. Each first interview was between 45 minutes and one hour long. Second interviews were simply as long as needed.

Conclusion

Feminist research holds a great deal of promise for my work regarding beginning teachers and gender equity issues in a rural context. By valuing context and my participants, I hoped to get an understanding of their experience. However, I also needed to remain cognizant of the limitations of my approach. Feminism has a history of ignoring marginalized women. Also, there are ethical implications for developing relationships with participants. Finally, I wanted to consider what it means to potentially give voice to men regarding the experience of girls in their classrooms. It was be important for me to keep my own positionality in mind and maintain focus on the purpose of my research. These are all elements I sought to keep in mind as I engaged in the study of the experience of beginning teachers in a rural context with regards to gender equity issues.

Chapter 4: Being a Beginning Teacher at a Rural School

One-fifth of students in the United States live in rural areas (Graham, 2009). The schools that serve these students often struggle to offer a robust curriculum (Graham, 2009). They also struggle to retain teachers (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012, Azano & Stewart, 2016), and tend to have more beginning teachers than their urban counterparts (Gagnon, 2016).

Past research on teaching in rural schools has found that small, rural communities are sources of support (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015) but can be difficult to fit into as an outsider (Burton & Johnson, 2010). Community was also a salient factor for participants in the current study. The small, tight-knit communities that these teachers found both in their schools and the surrounding community were big factors in their successes and challenges, and ultimately were a reason most teachers chose to stay.

This chapter will explore the reasons that small rural communities had such an impact on participants' experiences. Much of this impact was presented in the form of challenges. However, the nature of a small, close community also provided many benefits.

Challenges of Teaching in a Rural School

Rural environments bring unique challenges to teaching, especially in the case of beginning teachers (Hellsten, McIntyre, & Prytula, 2011). Coded data revealed that these challenges included workload, driving distance, resources, K-12 student preparation and motivation, a lack of privacy, and difficulty understanding or fitting in to the community. Participants shared multiple experiences and perceptions regarding these topics, and these experiences and perceptions lend rich depth and support to some trends found in the literature.

Workload. All ten participants experienced a high workload in their first year of teaching. Most participants agreed that they were overwhelmed. As Troy said,

The first year has been really hard, emotionally speaking. And I did, you know, I did the twelve-hour days. For most of the first semester. and now I'm only doing ten-hour days. It, it still wears on you...and I've just gotten sick over and over again.

Robyn noted:

It is hard. I have a lot, like, prep period, I can't prep a whole week or a whole, like, just too I, obviously knew teachers, were hard-working anyway going into this –

Researcher: Right.

Robyn: but wow. It's, it's a lot.

In her second interview, Robyn corroborated this feeling:

"I love it. I would say I love it a little less just because I'm getting more in the stress part, area, I'm getting like more, oh, okay, this isn't, it's a lot harder than I thought it would be. It's stressful, too."

Certain elements of teaching at a rural school were a big part of this high workload. One of the main obstacles that contributed to this was the number of preps, or different courses that each beginning teacher had to prepare. Each of the teachers had multiple preps, because their small schools needed them to fulfill multiple roles. This has been found in many other rural schools (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012; Smeaton & Waters, 2013). Goodpaster, Adedokun, and Weaver's (2012) interviews with six science teachers in rural settings found that this is even difficult for experienced teachers. Not only do they have to prepare multiple different lesson plans, but also, they have to learn new material themselves at times.

Kristie, a science teacher, stated that

it's difficult...I mean, first year teaching is hard. And then, putting on top of that, I have four preps and I also teach intensive lab-based classes and we don't have a textbook, and the administration thinks that an iPad is just, you know, a replacement for a textbook. I mean I understand the logic behind it, I really do, but, but it's been very difficult.

Robyn also struggled with her preps:

Robyn: I don't like, necessarily, one class that I teach, I could live without that, I think I would really love this job if I could cut it down to three preps instead of four.

Researcher: Right.

Robyn: My gosh, that would save my life.

Hope and Kyle were each teaching an AP class in their first year. Kyle noted that he appreciated the opportunity, but that it was a lot of work, especially since with the "harder material, I have to go back and re-teach myself how to do all this stuff, since it's been a couple of years since I've done it." He reported that the workload had definitely curtailed his social life.

I do try to do some things, but whenever it's like I go out and do something I feel like man, I should be working on something, or I'm going to get behind, but I try to leave some time to go out with, with either my girlfriend or with friends or just go home and spend time with family. But. Don't get a whole lot of that.

Some participants did not feel fully prepared for the workload of a rural school. Julia stated: "I still don't feel like I'm teaching anything, or like, that they're learning anything." She went on to explain that "I think that's just, like, a first-year teaching thing. My professors...said something like, yeah, you're not really gonna feel like you're teaching anything until a couple years in. For awhile it's just trying to survive." Julia was using curriculum from her colleagues on a day to day basis and was very worried about the next semester, when she would have to plan and teach one of her English classes on her own.

Distance from school. Another reason for the struggle with the workload reported by some participants was the driving distance to their schools. Only one participant, Chad, lived in the town where his school was located. Other participants tended to live in nearby larger towns or, in the case of Sara, her own rural hometown, which was a considerable distance away from her school. As young professionals, they tended to prefer being in a different, larger town, but it did mean that they lost time to their commutes. This was particularly challenging because many participants wanted to help with or attend sports and other curricular activities.

Robyn noted that “It’s hard, living far away. For me to get involved and stuff. If I want to do that. I also, you, know, want to live far enough away so I can have a life.” Troy shared that “I can’t say I’ve got a really good relationship with the community just yet...because I have an apartment in [larger town], I’m not trying to be a major community member here.”

Resources. Additionally, while some participants felt they had adequate or even superior resources, some expressed concern about the lack of resources, particularly regarding technology. This problem has been noted in the literature. Smeaton & Waters (2013) found that new teachers in rural schools were, at times, the last to get new technology due to seniority. When discussing her teacher preparation program, Robyn stated that teaching using technology was a big emphasis of her preparation. However, her school does not have a 1:1 laptop program and the available computers are outdated, so she had to teach largely without this type of technology. On top of her multiple preps, this change from her student teaching was quite a challenge.

Troy liked to record videos of how to solve various math problems for his students, but technology was a challenge:

I was, well, I have a ladybug camera, one of those old, ladybug document cameras. And the document has a kind of recording thing in it. So it's kind of a grainy video, and the sound pickup, I use my own headset from home, because the thing that they would offer me at the school was super bad.

Another resource that was lacking in a small school was the existence of larger departments. This limited the ability to collaborate with people within one's field, or with anyone who taught the same courses. Participants shared that their departments were small and that they didn't often teach courses also taught by someone else in the building. Robyn, a Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) teacher, was the only person in her department, so she did not have anyone in the building to talk with about her content area at all. Hope, the only Sophomore English teacher at her school, lamented that she could not collaborate with others on specific curriculum.

K-12 student preparation and motivation. Participants' perceptions of the preparation mirrored that in the literature. Participants reported that while some students are highly motivated, many students are not and do not necessarily have the level of skills that their counterparts in more urban schools might. Goodpaster, Adedokun, and Weaver (2012) found this to be the case as well. Rural students do not necessarily see a wide variety of careers modeled in their community, and particularly do not necessarily see careers that require college degrees (Eppley, 2015). Participants noted that their middle and high school students were less academically motivated and, in some cases, less academically prepared than they expected. Chad lamented

...the kids aren't, aren't really necessarily forced to feel like there's a need for their education out of high school. So, they think, show up. Do the bare minimum to get by.

Get that piece of paper and have the senior year and go out and do whatever it is that they've grown up around, and not to say that, there's kids that are, that are very smart, don't get me wrong, but...

Hope agreed: "...academics aren't really a priority for a lot of students, a lot of families. It's just kind of something they have to do." She specifically noted the lack of growth mindset in her students.

Some participants found themselves teaching lower-level skills than anticipated to their students. Troy blamed this on teacher turnover at his school. Kristie worried about the quality of teaching in her district. "They're not very good at problem-solving, so critical thinking skills are low, very much a worksheet/studyguide/test type of environment that they have been raised in..." She found it challenging to implement her style of teaching. "I've been trying to push the critical thinking element and then they definitely push back." This type of pushback is not uncommon. Rural school cultures of teaching often espouse conventional methods, and innovation is often not encouraged (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012).

These factors made it difficult for participants to avoid having a deficit view of their students and, at times, their schools. Deficit thinking is not uncommon among teachers in rural schools. Unfortunately, it poses a danger of ingraining assumptions that rural students will regularly be less motivated than other students (Azano & Stewart, 2016). Potentially, participants were more likely to notice differences as deficits because they did not yet understand the rural communities in which they taught.

Difficulty fitting in to the community. Previous studies have noted the double-edged sword of a close-knit community (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012; Hellsten, McIntyre, & Prytula, 2011). It can be difficult to be a teacher who is new in a community (Burton &

Johnson, 2010; Hellsten, McIntyre, & Prytula, 2011). Having a private life is a challenge, as is maintaining a positive reputation (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012).

Participants definitely experienced these issues found in the literature. A lack of anonymity was an important aspect of participants' experiences. "That's just one thing that I've, that's stuck out to me, is that nobody has any privacy," Sara explained. She mentioned this again in her second interview: "Everybody knows everybody and everybody knows everybody's business." Multiple participants mentioned this and noted both positives and drawbacks about this element of rural schools.

Because of this, situations in which new teachers did not find other staff or administration to be supportive were very difficult, isolating experiences. The small, close-knit community meant that it was difficult to find support in situations in which there was a negative relationship between established members of the community and newcomers. Sara shared that she ate lunch with and talked almost exclusively to two other new teachers, because a schism had formed between them and the veteran teachers at the beginning of the year. The effect was an isolating experience for the new teachers. Kristie found her administration to be downright hostile: "...my principal won't even say good morning to me in the hallway."

Like their school communities, participants found the towns that their schools were in to be tight-knit. Therefore, teachers also had to be careful to keep community relations positive. Troy pointed out that "You get the community against you and it kind of turns sour, because there's all of eight people have a voice around here." He referred to a colleague's experience: "Because that new teacher...she had a really hard time. And the community kind of turned against her for awhile, and her whole first year was just trying to fight one thing after another."

Understanding the expectations of their school communities was another challenge that sometimes made it difficult for participants to fit in. As beginning teachers, many participants were concerned about classroom management and student behavior in general. Several participants found that there were fewer management problems than in an urban school. Jaycee, who had student taught in a very urban environment, found that she had to adjust her expectations regarding things like cell phone use and swearing, both issues that were more prevalent in her urban student teaching placement. Speaking of teachers in an urban environment, she said, “they know what they need to fight. Because there’s so much going on at home with urban kids, I think.” In her second interview, she explained the impact of this in her new environment more thoroughly:

I was a little shocked at first with how quick the teachers were, like a kid let a bad word slip, and I was just kind of like, hey, watch your mouth, because that’s what I was used to ...and other teachers will be like, down to the principal’s office. And, or then other kids will be, like, looking in shock at the kid let a word slip and they’re like oh my gosh. And I’m like, oh, no, okay, so it’s not good, we’re not, okay, I’ve got to address this now.

Jaycee’s experience reflects a typical difference between urban and rural schools in terms of management. Teachers in rural schools tend to manage a classroom more closely on the instructional level (Martin, Yin, & Baldwin, 1997).

Some participants noted high teacher turnover at their schools. For Troy, this was one of the main reasons he planned to stay at his school, even though he faced many difficulties: “I’m just trying to stay there for math, to try and stop the turnover that they have at that school. Because that it, it’s disgusting to have five teachers in one year.” He clearly considered whether this was the best option for him:

This is been a really hard first year hopefully, hopefully I don’t have to deal with the

same kind of stuff next year, that would be just truly awful. So I don't know, it's that level of appreciation. That you don't always get, that I'm, I just keep thinking like I have a math degree and an education degree; go do something else but I can't see myself doing anything else, That's what sucks. I think I'm just a teacher. Just stuck.

During my second meeting with Troy, he was feeling a lot better and felt optimistic about his second year of teaching.

The two teachers who indicated they might leave their schools tended to be more critical of the perceived closed-mindedness of the school and surrounding communities. Kristie shared: "But honestly, and no one, no one there is willing to stand up and say anything. So, like, I tried, but like, I'm a first-year teacher, and I don't actually, I'm not from this community. Like, I can leave."

Julia, the other teacher who planned to leave after her first year, considered herself liberal and was also critical. She valued the community of her school, which was near where she grew up. She described something of an internal struggle:

...coming back is kind of a culture shock, because everybody is very religious, conservative, and I'm very not, so I have to like mask all of that, because parents are also incredibly vocal, and concerned, and they, if they knew more about me, personally, they might not like so much that I am teaching their children. Not that I'm, like shoveling liberal propaganda down their throats.

Julia was leaving because her fiancé had gotten a job elsewhere. If that had not been the case, she thinks she would have chosen to stay. Despite her concerns about the conservativeness of the community, she thought it would be a good place to come back and raise her children.

These challenges regarding teaching in a rural community created a considerable amount of stress for participants. Certainly, such difficulties may well be factors in high turnover in rural schools (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012). Potentially, participants might have had an

easier time if their teacher preparation programs had spent more time talking about rural schools; they reported receiving some, but not much, instruction about teaching in rural communities, so their previous experience often depended on whether they had had a practicum placement at a rural school. Despite this, a majority of participants planned to stay in their schools. For these participants, the challenges were outweighed by the benefits of teaching in a rural school.

Benefits of Teaching in a Rural School

Most participants felt that the benefits of teaching in a rural school provided an overall positive experience. Just as a small, tight-knit community had contributed to challenges, the rural community also contributed to the benefits of being a teacher. Both in-school and out-of-school community were important benefits to teachers.

Relationships with students. The most prominent value uncovered during values coding was that of participants building relationships with students. Participants found that connecting with students helped them in their work, and perceived that the rural environment helped them to make these connections. In this, their experience is shared with other rural teachers studied in the literature (Eppley, 2015; Burton & Johnson, 2015). One factor that allowed participants to connect with students was small class sizes. Most of participants' schools had around 100 students in each grade and relatively small class sizes. This environment allowed participants to get to know their students well and connect with them.

As Robyn said, "I feel like we have the opportunity to get to know them better. Since there's less students, which means we have more time to get to know them." In her second interview, she was even more passionate about this, saying "I love the students, a lot, like, that's why I do it. And I get that, and I've always felt like that, I really love these guys."

Relationships with parents. Several participants also mentioned high parental involvement in the rural setting. Strong connections with parents can be an excellent asset of teaching in a rural school (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012). This is one hallmark of many rural schools; to some extent, they become the center of small communities (Eppley, 2015). Participants mostly viewed this as a positive aspect. Parents were likely to be involved in school life. For example, participants reported that parents were highly likely to attend games. As Julia put it regarding her high school students, “parents are very much present in a lot of their lives.”

Relationships with colleagues. Having a close staff generally resulted in new teachers feeling as though they had a lot of support. The majority of participants found the school administration and staff to be supportive. Some were teaching in schools with a lot of recent turnover and enjoyed having multiple new teachers with whom to connect. The ability to spend time with other first year teachers is an important element of the beginning rural teaching experience (Hellsten, McIntyre, and Prytula, 2011). Most found significant support in their departments. Don, for example, was able to work with the high school Spanish teacher to align assessments. Veteran teachers in Julia’s department who had taught her courses in the past shared curricular materials with her. Kyle, Hope and Jaycee also found their departments to be very supportive. While she was the only FACS teacher at her school, Robyn also found the teaching community within her school to be a significant positive aspect of her experience:

And they’re not all from here, but they are all care so much about this small area and I feel like they’re, I don’t know, they created this little place. That’s what I feel like, that’s, you get that lived feeling, that family feeling, that I don’t think you get in a bigger place.

Robyn contrasted this to her student teaching experience in a more urban setting. She found classroom management to be her major focus in the urban area, and also did not feel

supported by her mentor teachers:

Yeah I just, I just I was in between two co-op – two teachers. That oversaw me. And then I just feel like they didn't have the best relationship. And so I'm working with both of them, and that's when it got hard....one of them was retiring, so she didn't really, I mean I'm just going to say it she didn't really, I guess she was a little checked out.

Robyn's other mentor was also not supportive: "just kind of, very degrading, I think. Just saying that I look so young, that I'll never be taken seri – [sic] (seriously) just like little things. Like just, I'm like well I can't help how I look..." Robyn's experience almost kept her from entering the profession, and she was grateful for her supportive colleagues in her rural school.

Participants noted that the small community also meant that it was easier to get to know people. Jaycee noted, for example, a community feel that "revolves around the school, I think." Therefore, despite the challenges they faced, the majority of participants (eight out of ten) planned to stay at their schools. Many of them expressed positive feelings about the community, the school, and the students, again showing their high value for close relationships with students. As Kyle said:

Probably in the spring, it's really going to be overwhelming, but I think it will be worth it in the long run, and I hope this will be a long-term job because I, the people are great there; the kids have been really good, and it seems like a really good little, really good county and school district and everything.

Chad stated that "I absolutely love it, I love being around the kids, and each day is kind of a challenge, but at the same time, it's very rewarding, a very rewarding career so far." Chad also appreciated being in his home town near family.

But I just like the small town, I like the, how close-knit everybody seems to be, and for the most part, it's been good to me, so being able to give back to the, like I said my community and my school is...the one big reason I'd like to stay.

Other participants were not in their home towns, but appreciated the rural aspect of their work life. Some had grown up in rural areas and felt at home. Others had not, but mentioned how much they valued the rural community.

Overall, participants seemed to be doing well, and most of them hoped to remain in their positions. Although the workload was high, these new teachers were developing strategies to deal with this. Additionally, some of them helped with extra-curricular activities or offered tutoring after school. It is possible that their perception of their preparation underestimated how much they had really learned. Despite their struggles, participants were largely successful and glad to be teachers in their rural schools.

Chapter 5: Teaching for Gender Equity

This chapter turns from a focus on being a beginning teacher in a rural environment to the beginning teacher's perceptions of and response to gender equity issues. In this chapter, I will first discuss participants' perceptions of differences in student behavior. I then will address their perceptions of student academic achievement. I describe how participants believe they treat their students. Then, I turn towards the institutional sexism uncovered in my interviews. Finally, I will examine the role of teacher preparation in shaping participants' ability to teach for gender equity.

Data shows that participants believed that they were progressive in their thinking and, on the whole, perceived that they were providing an equitable classroom environment. However, in most cases, they had not been given the tools they needed to critically examine their own work and that of their schools regarding gender equity, and as a result, most participants provided a culture of assumed equality as well as one unwilling to address difficult gender concerns. This gender-blind view allows pervasive sexism to persist (Towery, 2007).

Rowdy Boys

Martin, Yin, & Baldwin (1997), through surveys of urban and rural high school teachers, found that rural teachers are more likely to report high levels of instructional management. Participants in the current study aligned with this finding, noting that students were used to a stricter management style. Although participants found management in the rural environment to be easier than more populous schools and for behavioral expectations to be higher, they still ran into management issues, and they found these to be very gendered. Most participants found boys to be louder, more disruptive, and more physically active than girls. They felt that girls were generally quieter and more compliant.

As Chad put it,

Men – males – feel like they can get away with more things than the females, I mean, the females, they're pretty laid back, and there's some guys in my class...that are kind of, not out of control, but they just tend to goof off and think they're going to get away with it.

And that's not the case.

Hope agreed. She was pleased that she had few behavior issues, but was clear that it was “boys, overwhelmingly” who were responsible for the classroom management problems that she did have.

There were some counterexamples. Don felt that boys were the cause of 90 percent of the management issues for most of his classes with the exception of one class that was mostly girls. This gender imbalance was due to the timing of his Spanish I (an honors class) and choir. This was the only Spanish I class that members of the choir could attend. In that class, he struggled to limit side conversations and was able to explore less material with the students as a result. Troy had one class period with a similar dynamic, with girls chatting disruptively. However, on the whole, teachers found boys to be more disruptive.

Only Robyn found the boys to be less of a management issue overall, stating that girls gave her more “attitude.” She found boys to be more “respectful.” Jaycee also noted getting more “attitude” from some girls, but also found the boys to be more talkative and disruptive in class. Robyn's experience may simply be an anomaly. However, since her subject, Family and Consumer Sciences, is traditionally a female field, it may be that Robyn's female students feel the type of confidence that boys feel in most other classes. Potentially, they do not feel the pressure to behave as well because of this confidence.

The Compliant Buffer

With some variation, participants had largely created an environment in which girls were well-behaved students who helped teachers maintain a managed classroom. This included girls being strategically placed classroom structures such as seating charts and group work. It also included more abstract things such as being quiet and wearing appropriate clothing. This type of compliance comes at a price for female students; they receive less teacher attention because teachers need to intervene with boys' behavior (Owens, Smothers, & Love, 2003).

Julia, who brought up gender issues as one of her most important values and who, like all participants, was clearly committed to the success of all of her students, still gave examples of an environment in which girls were, in some sense, responsible for male behavior.

Boys can sometimes be jerks, and girls are sometimes kind of like whiny, I guess, when they're jerks. So then I find myself being like, guys, you're old enough, like, be nice, you know how to be nice to each other, let's respect each other.

In this instance, Julia is making it clear that boys are the instigators of conflict. However, all students are responsible for this behavior and the resulting conflict. Girls are "whiny" in their response and this is deemed as also problematic.

One area in which girls were used as buffers was in seating charts. Girls were a physical buffer between misbehaving boys. As Julia said, "In fourth period, I found that, like, throwing girls into the mix with boys has quieted them. So I would say that's how I seated that class."

Jaycee also used that strategy: "I split them up and I try to put girls next to them, almost as barriers...so the poor girls have to sit next to them, then." She remembered disliking it when she was used as a buffer in high school, as "...the quiet one who got stuck next to the loud guy

who wouldn't stop talking in class...but now I understand why." Jaycee realized that she was disadvantaging girls in this situation, but her classroom management needs were more important.

As part of their role in the classroom, girls were more likely to be seen as supportive, nurturing, and group-oriented, while boys were more individualistic. For example, Sara found that her female students noticed when she was stressed out and asked her about it, whereas her male students did not. Kristie said that

I mean, I think, if you're going to speak to gender I think it's pretty typical. So, girls play the role of, you know the caretakers, where the guys are the ones that think they should be taken care of...

Troy found girls to be more group-oriented:

When the guys are more proud of their own achievements: I did this. This was me.

Versus the girls having a group kind of thing so the guys will compare their scores and say ha ha, I beat you. I did this. The girls will compare the scores and they'll say it more as the we.

Beyond Compliance: Recipients of Harassment

Participants described three categories of harassment. They most commonly encountered harassment within genders. They shared some examples of sexual harassment between genders. In these cases, boys were always the harassers. Finally, participants were aware of some harassment towards students who openly identified as LGBTQ or were perceived as potentially identifying that way.

Each of these types of harassment does not exist in a separate social realm from the others. Domination is one method of constructing hierarchies of masculinity. At the top of this hierarchy are men who show elements of domination over other men and women. Less-powerful

men may see domination of women as a way to display their masculinity. Another way boys can establish their masculinity is to harass boys for implied LGBTQ status. This, in turn, makes it more difficult for boys to do stereotypically feminine things, including putting effort into their schoolwork (Morris, 2008).

Harassment within genders. Multiple participants noted that negative interactions between students were largely within genders. In most cases, they did not perceive that boys and girls were harassing one another. It may be that students found themselves best able to establish hierarchy using within-gender harassment. It is also possible that teachers were not privy to or did not recognize harassment when it was between genders, since hegemonic male hierarchy is so engrained in our society. Don found that

The guys are more likely to harass other guys. There are some, there are some guys that might, might call names to the girls...but I understand that the girls can be pretty psychologically damaging too, as far as silent treatments go. And there's probably a lot of things that go on social media that I don't have any access to.

Don's perceptions align with the literature in terms of boys. They are more likely to physically harass others. Girls, however, have not been found to psychologically harass others any more than boys do (Graham, 2016).

Hope's experience, like Graham's work, found psychological issues to be present in male and female gender groups. She seemed to think this was unusual, saying

between them, they have, they've been having some drama, some relationship dramas like, you know. This person likes this person, oh, amongst girls there's been some, even boys, too, there's been some pushing out of cliques and stuff that I've noticed.

The fact that this cliquish behavior happened “even with boys” reflects the perception that girls are more likely to engage in relational harassment.

Boys harassing girls. While most harassment appeared to be within gender groups, in the few cases that participants noted sexual harassment between genders, it was always boys harassing girls. This evidence supports the concept of boys occasionally using harassment of girls to better establish their masculinity as described by Morris (2008). Since teachers are known to dismiss harassment, especially if girls see it as teasing, it is also possible that participants encountered more harassment of girls by boys than they reported.

Julia had observed sexual harassment between genders on three occasions, a boy being a perpetrator in every case. Twice, it was inappropriate comments, but one incident was different.

Back in October, one of my students was doing, like, a 31 days of Halloween kind of dressing thing, and they had some kids come in and draw penises on their faces...It was, like, harassment towards her, because they thought she was weird for dressing up, so they were going to make fun of her in that way. So then, she wasn't allowed to dress up any more for the rest of the month.

Again in this case, a girl was held responsible for the negative behavior of boys.

Troy also agreed that harassment or inappropriate behavior occurred within gender groups, but he did have a counterexample:

It's mostly amongst the same gender. Boys slapping each other on the butt, girls doing the same. There was one time, a boy came by in the hall and smacked a girl on the butt and she seemed weirded out by it. So I first asked her if she was okay and if, if that was her friend or something, or if that, if it was something that I should take concern about.

Upon doing this, Troy learned that the girl was not okay with the action. These experiences mirror the literature; girls are more likely than boys to be recipients of sexual harassment, and boys are more likely to be the perpetrators. Additionally, teachers are not likely to view many actions as harassment, especially if girls seem to be okay with it. This reflects a lack of understanding of the pressures on girls to deny that harassment is happening to them (Rahimi & Liston, 2011). Troy felt that the best outcome for the girl involved was to check in with her about her feelings about the harassment before reporting it, a common reaction (Rahimi & Liston, 2011).

In their interactions with their teachers, boys occasionally did employ male dominance. Julia encountered some sexist behavior towards her from her students. Some of her male students would snap their fingers for her attention and say, “Hey, teacher lady.” She refused to be talked to that way: “And I was like, I have a name, and I’m not a dog. Try that again.” This was effective in the short term but revealed in her second interview that she was still being treated the same way by some male students. No male participants mentioned any similar disrespect from any of their students. This possibly shows that, even with the power differential between teacher and student, boys might feel comfortable using their gender to dominate their teachers.

Harassment against students identifying as LGBTQ. Sexual minorities also faced harassment in participant schools. When asked if students who identified as LGBTQ felt comfortable being out in her school, Kristie shared concern about harassment of two transgender students in her school. “So like if they decide to use the bathroom that they identify with versus what their biological sex is they get threatened. Said that they are going to get the crap beat out of them by students...”

Academics: Unmotivated ‘Smart’ Boys and High-Achieving Girls

With one exception, participants shared that girls and boys were doing the same, academically, or that girls were doing better. They generally attributed this to work ethic, including turning in assignments, using work time well, and asking for help. Hope expressed her belief that in some cases, a lack of effort was an equalizer in her AP English class. “..the boys kind of sit themselves at the back and, and goof off, but they’re smart, so they can get away with it.”

Chad shared that

I feel like the female students are a little bit more, they seem to have a little bit more care about their grades. So if they see something slipping, that is where that they will approach me about it...Whereas a male will get three out of ten on an assignment, and just, like, oh, push it to the side. And not to say there’s not females like that, and not to say that there’s not males that aren’t like that, but predominantly, it’s, the females are better students.

Robyn, a FACS teacher, was an exception to this. She found that boys tended to do better, academically, in her classes. “And that’s only because, just from a couple of girls today that I talked to about laziness. I think laziness is my biggest issue.”

This exception may shed light on the reason that boys felt free to sit in the back or work less hard in other classes. As Sadker (2002) pointed out, while boys continually get lower grades, they are still more likely to attain future success. For example, men out-earn women in terms of doctoral degrees. Additionally, teachers perceive boys as more capable and see their negative behavior not as something that impedes their learning, but rather, as something they can get away with because of their innate talent. Perhaps, as is possibly the case with behavior,

Robyn's female students had confidence regarding the material in her class that gave them license to skip assignments.

Many participants taught required courses, and so the gender balance of them was equal. In the case of honors English and language courses, as well as Child Development (only two boys), and theatre (only three boys), though, participants reported a higher percentage of girls. Chad noted that his remedial tenth grade math class was male-dominated. The overall picture, in both classroom achievement and enrollment, was that girls were more academically accomplished than their male peers, and that this was mostly due to motivation, a trend noted widely in the literature (Legewie & Diprete, 2012; Morris, 2008).

Teaching for Equity

Gender blindness vs. the teacher's reality. "I largely see the same, they react to things differently, but I attribute that to being different people as well. Rather than just being male or female," Troy explained. Across the board, participants expressed a commitment to helping all students, regardless of gender or other differences. Many participants perceived that they treated all students the same, regardless of gender.

Similar to color-blindness, a practice that has been criticized by those who practice critical multiculturalism (Vavrus, 2010), a theory of gender-blindness keeps teachers from critically investigating their own biases (Sadker, 2000). Participant intent did not necessarily mean that equal treatment was or was not happening; there is evidence in the literature that teachers' perceptions of gender balance in the classroom is inaccurate, regardless of how well-meaning these teachers are in terms of equal participation (Shumow & Schmidt, 2013; Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2007). Studies show that on the whole and without knowing it, teachers tend to give disproportionately high attention to their male students (Sadker, 2000; Sadker, 2002).

This belief that gender-blind treatment was possible, therefore, may have resulted in an inequitable situation for girls in their classrooms.

Participants, even those who were confident that they treated genders the same, gave examples of differences inherent in their classrooms. Troy and Chad, for example, mentioned that they felt they needed to be more careful with girls and not get too close to them, alluding to fears that they might be accused of having an unprofessional relationship with them. As young male teachers, they felt that maintaining some sort of distance was important in keeping their careers. As a result, they found that they were able to be closer with their male students.

Relationships outside of class had an impact on the way participants treated their students as well. Chad was involved with boys' athletics, and found that that strengthened his relationship with the boys. This is common and helpful for students; students who have positive, developmentally oriented relationships with coaches tend to have multiple positive outcomes, including intrinsic motivation and good concentration (Scales, 2016).

In response to a question about whether she treated her girls and boys differently, Robyn said,

I don't think so. I mean, obviously, we all, I want to say, try not to do that. I would say in my child development class, maybe, sometimes. Because I feel like it is generally more of a girl-driven class.

Other participants were clear that they treated students differently. Kristie recognized the existence of subtle bias, responding to the question of whether she treated genders equally with "I mean, I think we all do. I think if you come in and even try not to, you do." In her case, she suspected that "I push the girls in my class a little bit harder and that's probably just from a personal, like, you know, kind of chip on my shoulder."

Jaycee also felt that she pushed her female students more. Again, this was related to her experience as a former high school girl.

But the girls just seem older, and because I was a girl in high school, I kind of know, like, oh, yeah, my freshman year, I was doing this and this and this, and I didn't have any issues in class...I do expect a little more from the girls than the boys.

While she may have pushed her girls more, when it came to classroom participation, Jaycee found that her boys got more air time: "it just seems like, because they participate a lot in class, they're usually the ones who raise their hands first, and you're like, oh, he's the talker, so this will be good."

Some participants felt that boys needed different treatment than girls, reflecting a somewhat essentialist perspective or, perhaps, an understanding of the impact of socialization.

Don said:

I do treat them differently because girls are different from, from boys. Boys, you know, they can talk about some rougher things. And I feel like you can be a little bit gruffer with guys, because they're more...gruff. But sometimes they need to be talked to in a gentler manner. And then, and certainly I have more experience talking to the boys than the girls. As far as, as far as teaching, I don't really have any difference, but as far as handling discipline issues, I, I can relate more to the boys.

He went on to say that

I think I understand it more because I am male. But, also, as far as stereotypes go, like, men still want to be the man. See, the students, the boys, they still want to be men. And they want to be strong men.

Don's expectation that his boys wanted to be "strong men" may be an example of the "soft essentialism" that Messner (2011) notes in youth sports, in which natural differences between girls and boys are assumed, but placed in a liberal context that, on its face, values equity.

Julia also portrayed a soft essentialist view, stating that

The guys are more like joking with them about one thing or another, or sarcastic comments, and they seem to thrive on that more. I can usually be a little more, like, rough and blunt with the guys, and this is probably my own stereotyping coming into play, but I feel like I need to be a little more, like, gentle with the girls. Because I know that high school's kind of a hard stage to be in, emotionally.

Hope had been working on treating her students equally. It was not always easy for her, though, when it came to management. She contrasted the experience of "throw(ing) them out": "I noticed the one, the girl, I wasn't as scared, I was just kind of fed up with her...the other one, like, scared me. He's also much bigger than me." Hope was worried about how that interaction would go:

Hope: And he knows it, and I know it, so we're just kind of like

B: Yeah.

Hope: let's acknowledge that you are bigger than me and I want you to go to the office (laughs).

Hope's intervention was successful, and she was able to reconnect with the student the next school day. Her fear that her student's gender and size would make the interaction unsuccessful turned out to be unfounded.

Sara reflected on her treatment of genders as follows: "I would say in terms of discipline it's definitely across the board but in terms of relationships with the students it's probably a little

bit different; girls tend to be more approachable...” Sara lamented that the boys would try to connect with her through sports conversations, which were very far from her expertise and therefore not a conversation in which she could really engage. She believed that coaches were more likely to connect with their male students.

As a whole, participants were clearly hopeful that their boys and girls had equal opportunities. However, to a large extent, they did not have the tools to discern whether this was true. They also did not have the tools, and in many cases the time and energy, to incorporate equity practices into their teaching.

Incorporating content for equity. The majority of participants had not intentionally incorporated content for gender equity. Some noted that their textbooks seemed equitable. Math books used a wide variety of names, both regarding gender and ethnicity. Hope had one textbook that had a unit on gender in literature, so she expected to teach that in the future. Sara had highlighted some women artists, and Don had done so as well, but not specifically because they were women.

Troy said, “when we’re talking about baseball, every once in awhile we do softball instead, or not football, doing volleyball...” Troy wanted to ensure that girls saw their sports in various math activities. In doing so, he saw those as the exception, and boys’ activities as the norm. Therefore, he used girls’ examples “every once in awhile.”

Conversely, Robyn had several positive examples of content inclusion for equity. Her textbook only showed stereotypical nuclear families, and she was sure to talk about same-sex couples. She also emphasized the existence of paternity leave. When her students took home pretend babies, she emphasized the presence of unisex clothing in addition to the gendered

clothes, and found that some students chose to use that clothing. Robyn also took the opportunity in her cooking class to discuss “how men are cooking more, too.”

While teaching about DNA, Kristie highlighted the importance of Rosalind Franklin in its discovery:

I said you know, don't think that Watson and Crick did all of the work, because if we're going to be honest, Rosalind needed to be right there with them, and I don't even know if they actually deserve that award because she's the one who actually did it, because without her work, you know, they wouldn't have been...and like, I've talked about a couple of things like that.

She received pushback for this type of instruction from her students: “Ms. _____, you're just sexist, blah blah blah, and I'm like, okay you don't even really know what that means, you can calm down.” Statements such of these by students, which allude to the concept of reverse sexism, are evidence that students are so used to a male-normed world that the inclusion of a woman scientist in their curriculum, and a discussion about why, made them uncomfortable. This type of rejection of content offered by the teacher could cause a teacher to reconsider using such a strategy again, resulting in a less equitable classroom.

Incorporating pedagogy for equity. In most cases, participants did not understand an interview question that asked them about pedagogical strategies to teach for gender equity. This is not surprising; education courses spend little time teaching about gender bias and even less about how to address such bias (Sadker, 2000). Therefore, it is understandable that when this question was explained participants rarely noted any pedagogical strategies for equity. Many participants responded by emphasizing that they just treat everyone equally. Very few

participants mentioned implicit bias or other more complex ideas that might make this difficult to do.

One important strategy in teaching for gender equity is encouragement of participation of all students in class discussions (Sadker, 2000). Hope and Kyle mentioned strategies to call on students randomly. However, multiple participants noted that they called on students whose hands were raised, or on students who did not appear to be paying attention. Jaycee found that calling on her boys helped her move the lesson along.

Some participants wanted to actively avoid discussions about gender equity. Troy said his attitude often was, “please, kids. I don’t know how to deal with this. And so if anything, I try to avoid it, as often as I can.” Troy’s avoidance due to a feeling of not knowing what to do ties back to a gender-blind approach, in which he attempts to teach all students equally.

Confronting isms. At times, participants found that they had to confront inappropriate comments or actions related to equity. These included sexist, racist, and homophobic statements. All participants expressed that they refused to tolerate such statements. Most told students that they were being inappropriate and to stop. Troy described his strategy: “Normally it’s just please don’t say, please don’t do that. They ask me, why? And I say just please don’t....that’s been enough so far. I don’t know how I’d handle it if it went any further.” This reactive approach was meant to keep the classroom a safe and respectful place for students. Confronting statements such as slurs is an important part of keeping a classroom safe (McGarry, 2011).

Like all other participants, Don did not allow inappropriate comments, but beyond that, indicated a gender-blind approach:

I try and stay mostly away from that. It comes up a few times and when it has come up, I just say, you know, it’s not any of my business. Whatever. I teach you guys all the same.

It's not my business.

Later, Don expressed the belief that doing otherwise would actually be ideal, but would also get him into trouble:

Because the classroom, I find is not... I mean, it's probably the best place to talk about it. Safe space, with an adult that can be the voice of reason, that can moderate the discussion. The problem, I think, would be that not everyone would agree, and the teacher might be seen favoring one side or the other, and that causes problems for the teacher, and the administration, and the teacher would probably get canned.

Fears of participants like Don and Troy prevented them from going further than simply encountering inappropriate language. In so doing, they miss opportunities to help their students learn about practices such as name calling in a deeper way (McGarry, 2011).

Kristie had a proactive approach. She chose to put a rainbow flag in her classroom. She also coached her girls in upper-level science courses about what they would face in college: "...you're going to be in your classes and your professor's going to think that you can't do it because you're a girl...I mean, I hope it's not true for them," but that had been Kristie's experience, and she wanted to prepare her female students. Kristie went on to talk about expectations for girls, saying

the girls can do it but they haven't always been told their whole life that they can do it, so they think they can't. Which is disheartening, but I think that they know in my classroom that I don't take that for an answer...

Kristie paired her support of her students with high expectations, a combination that set the stage for a positive and helpful coach-like relationship (Scales, 2016).

With the exception of confronting biased attitudes that were presented to them by

students, such as a slur or other ism, most participants reported not incorporating content or pedagogy for gender equity. It was clear that many other important teaching issues were more valuable to them. It was also clear that the overwhelm they felt as first-year teachers meant that they didn't have the time or energy to incorporate things that did not rise to the level of most important in terms of their values.

Institutional Sexism

As they grappled with issues of equity in the classroom, participants also were involved in the generally tight-knit communities of their rural schools. Therefore, it was important to investigate whether beginning teachers found that schools, as institutions that included rules, structures, administration, teachers, students, and other members of the school community, created an environment of gender equity.

Most participants felt that students were treated equally by their schools, but as certain areas of school life were discussed, some areas of inequity became apparent. Three themes emerged: dress code, extracurricular activities, and equity and support for students identifying as LGBTQ. In all three areas, participants had examples about ways in which schools were not providing girls and/or LGBTQ students with the same experiences as heterosexual, cis-gendered boys.

Dress code. School dress codes are often unfair to girls and students who are gender non-conforming (Raby, 2010). They are an example of a fine line that girls maintain, one in which media encourages them to be sexualized (Douglas, 2010). At the same time, the school as an institution seeks to police things such as their dress, holding them responsible for distracting boys (Rahimi & Liston, 2009). As a result, girls are asked to “navigate the fine line between attractive and provocative” (Raby, 2010). I brought or accessed online the relevant school dress

code to at least one of the interviews with each participant, with the exception of my interviews with Jaycee. Bringing the document ended up being less relevant than I anticipated because many participants brought up dress code before I did.

Six of the ten participants found the dress code to be sexist in some way. This was not to say that the rules were written differently for each gender, but rather that they seemed to target girls' styles more than boys' and were also, in some cases, differentially enforced. This emphasis on girls' appearance is common (Wood, 2015). "I've always thought of it as incredibly sexist because it's always the girls that get in trouble," Sara shared.

Kristie observed

...a guy can just basically...wear whatever they want, but a girl...you know, wears, like too short of a skirt, they think, or, you know, shows their shoulders, and the administration flips out, and that girl misses class time, because it's distracting to, you know, the guys, and I think that's not fair...

Sleeveless shirts were a big issue in this area. In many schools, girls could not have a tank top or shoulders cut out, which was very popular. It was also popular for boys to cut the sleeves and some of the shirt out of a tee shirt, a style which also broke the sleeveless rule. Troy noted that he observed these shirts still being worn: "And he's like walking down the hall going to fourth period and it's like how do they go this far? Either they sent him, and they said it's okay, or none of the teachers sent him." Troy's experience of boys being less likely to receive consequences for breaking dress code reflects an environment in which girls are considered responsible to prevent their own sexual harassment, but not the other way around.

Kristie witnessed a dress code situation that also showed gender imbalance.

...there's one situation when a girl was dating a football player. And she wore like a really cute dress with like, you know, with just the cutout sleeves or whatever, and the administration wouldn't talk to her when she was with her boyfriend who was on the football team, they wouldn't say anything to her, but when she walked away from him, they grabbed her and said, hey, like, you're going to have to go to you, the office and call home, or find a sweater, and actually another teacher who was very upset about the situation gave her a sweater to wear for the rest of the day...

Kristie perceived the school administration as catering to a male athlete in this situation, not wanting him to made aware that his girlfriend was about to be punished.

Short shorts and skirts were another dress code issue. Long shorts were popular for boys and passed dress code; girls' athletic shorts that were popular were much shorter. Don noted that even on hot days, girls tended to wear pants because there was not a popular style of shorts for them that was in line with dress code. Ripped jeans, especially with rips near the pockets of the jeans, were also popular for girls but not for boys. As a result, girls were sent to the office for dress code violations more than boys.

Jaycee noted that, much like their young teachers, both girls and boys in her speech class were upset about the dress code. The girls did not feel that they should be responsible for boys being distracted. The boys agreed. She found this interesting because she hadn't encountered many dress code issues and had never felt the need to send a student to the office for a dress code violation. She concluded that parents probably didn't allow their children out of the house in clothing that was potentially inappropriate.

One sentiment that was expressed, in general, was a disinclination towards dealing with dress code issues. Beginning teachers did not agree with the argument that girls were a

distraction and/or did not want girls to miss class time. Sara would offer duct tape to girls so that they could cover up holes and ask them if they had a sweater in their locker to cover up straps; she tried to avoid sending them to the office. Kyle was grateful to have a first period prep so that students would have already encountered a teacher before seeing him.

Sports. Sports were a very important element of school life for all of the schools in which participants taught. Some of them were involved as assistant coaches or in some other assisting role. Others made a point of attending games. Still others were not particularly interested in sports and chose to allocate their valuable time elsewhere. Regardless, multiple participants identified sports as an important part of school life, and in many cases, community life as well. Speaking of football, Jaycee said, "...here, at the rural school, it's like, that's the place to be. Friday night, you're at the game." She went on to say that her students had explained to her that Friday night basketball games were also "...a huge deal. You're not at the basketball game on a Friday night, then apparently you have nothing going on in your life but sitting home on the couch. Because that is where you go."

Both Sara and Chad noted that athletes are pushed to also do well academically. Sara found that coaches would contact her about their students' grades, and Chad noted that athletes were encouraged to attend tutoring instead of practice if they were struggling academically. Sara said, "...it doesn't matter, if you play a sport, you're paid more attention to, and given more leniency in terms of, I really need this project, or I really need this assignment."

Since sports are such an important part of the rural school life as described by participants, inequitable sporting experiences would certainly have an effect on those students not receiving an equal experience. While Title IX has certainly improved sports experiences for girls, girls have fewer spots on school sports teams. This is true despite the fact that schools try

to offer an equal number of sports. Some boys' sports, such as football, tend to have more playing spots, and they are more likely to have junior varsity teams (Women's Sports Foundation, 2011). Girls are also less likely to see female role models in the sport. For example, their coaches are more likely to be men, while boys' coaches are very rarely women (Walker & Bopp, 2010).

One element of equity in sports is support for a team. Cheerleaders and school bands are both examples of structures that support a team. When asked about cheerleading, participants recalled that while cheerleaders were very involved in football games, they did not cheer for volleyball, or any other fall girls' sport at their schools. Therefore, cheerleading resources were only dedicated to male teams during the fall season. Cheerleaders were overwhelmingly girls; only one participant mentioned a current male cheerleader, and that boy was in 8th grade, on the junior high squad. This resulted in a situation of girls largely cheering on their male peers. As basketball season started, many participants noted that cheerleaders cheered for the boys and not the girls, although this was not the case in every school.

Chad reported that the band split its time between girls' and boys' basketball: "...the boys' basketball program doesn't like it, because obviously they miss on about, it's about half and half, so they miss out on the band being there for that other half of the game." Chad's wording highlights the ways in which boys' programs are used to the privilege of the support of the band, and the perception that a policy that results in equal treatment is something to be mourned rather than lauded by the boys' team. Chad also was able to discuss the response of the female team:

Whereas the female, it's kind of weird, because obviously the crowd's usually generally a little bit smaller at a female, or a girls' basketball game, than there is at boys', but you

know, it makes the band seem a little bit louder when there's less people in there, and actually our girls basketball coach, they had the bench is right in front of where the band plays. He moved his bench to the other side, because he didn't like the band being there, and as loud, so.

Chad points out that the male coach of the female team, rather than celebrating this support of his girls, sends signals that he does not like it.

Some participants noticed that girls had fewer opportunities to participate in sports. Chad noted that girls seemed to drop out of some sports as they got older; he knew several girls who played football in elementary and middle school, but stopped playing at the high school level.

In contrast to other participants, Don had the perception that boys had limited sports opportunities:

The football, right you can only have 11 guys on the team -- on the field that one time? You've got different teams, of course, your offensive, your defensive team your kick off, your kickoff receiving team. But it's a little more selective. And basketball they can only have five guys on the floor, and if you have 11 guys, like when are the rest of them going to play? When is anyone going to play if you have 11 guys and five are really fantastic? And are on the floor all the time?

It is interesting that Don realized that football teams had multiple sub-teams, but still perceived that boys had fewer opportunities, while football is a sport that provides many more opportunities than popular girls' sports (Women's Sports Foundation, 2011).

Some participants taught in schools that tried to split up prime time so that girls and boys each had a chance to play on Friday evenings. However, this was not always the case. Jaycee reported that girls played on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but not on Fridays. This may have set up

a recurring cycle. Girls may have had a smaller audience, but they also had a less popular time, place, and supporting faction (including band and cheerleaders, members of which presumably have parents and friends who want to see them perform) to help them attract an audience. This disadvantage could continually reinforce the perception that people prefer to see boys' games over girls'.

A range of support for LGBTQ students: 'I think it would be tough for them'

(Jaycee). Some participants knew of students who identified as LGBTQ and were out (willing to be public about their identity or sexuality). In many cases, however, no students were out. As Jaycee said, in many situations, such as the schools in which no students were out, it would be tough for students to be openly LGBTQ. Jaycee did not know of any students who were out in her school, saying "I think it would be tough for them."

Conversely, a couple schools had a gay/straight alliance (GSA) and students at Kyle's school were petitioning for one. Troy's school did have an LGBTQ community, and he noted that students who identified as LGBTQ were harassed by other students. This aligns with Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull's (2015) finding that LGBTQ students in rural areas are more likely to face harassment than their urban peers. Troy's perception was that teachers definitely addressed this harassment when LGBTQ students came to them for help. These students had also felt comfortable going to the administration for help with the harassment.

However, administrative support did not exist in all situations. Kristie mentioned that her school had two students who were transgender, and said that there were "...a couple that are, I guess you could consider nonconforming." When asked about their treatment and comfort level, Kristie was clear: "...no they 112 percent do not feel comfortable. They've actually been outright discriminated by the administration."

Kristie tried to make these students feel comfortable. After teaching at her school for a while and hearing that another teacher had put up a rainbow flag, Kristie did the same along with an equals sign flag. By chance, the administration happened to be out of town on the day she did this. She was then absent and the rainbow flag was taken down without her knowledge. Upon her return, she was called in to talk with the administration. Her employers assumed she had purposely posted the flags upon their absence and compared her actions to posting a KKK or Confederate flag. Kristie suspects that her equal rights flag remained only because the administration did not know what it symbolized. This, in conjunction with many other incidents, led Kristie to believe that her administration was “not really sending their students up to succeed in the real world.” Certainly, given findings that LGBTQ students who face harassment are more likely to have lower achievement (Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull, 2015), this lack of support is a definite detriment.

The Role of Teacher Preparation

Participants were mixed about the role their teacher preparation programs had prepared them to teach for gender equity. In general, if it was mentioned at all, gender equity was a small part of a diversity course. Very few mentioned that their programs discussed LGBTQ students. This aligns with findings that preservice teachers lack an understanding of the negative impacts that LGBTQ students face at school (Milburn & Palladino, 2012) and do not know how to incorporate LGBTQ content into their plans in order to teach for equity. When gender was discussed in teacher prep programs, the main topic that participants remembered was that girls and women are underrepresented in science and math disciplines. Some participants recalled being told to treat girls and boys the same, and that they are the same academically.

Troy's experience was a little more robust. His diversity class did several activities regarding gender.

But I don't know, because I never used it myself when I was a student teacher...I never practiced it. You know, I got the theory so to speak, but I never actually got the practice. I don't know. I'd, I'd struggle if I was to implement it. That's probably why I'm not implementing.

Troy's reflection outlines a problem that can exist in teacher education. Multicultural education, in particular, is often compartmentalized in one or two classes. These are often foundational courses, taken prior to field experience. (Vavrus, 2010). This structure is problematic in terms of translating theory into practice. The importance of bringing equity thinking to practice was exemplified by Kyle's experience. His student teaching supervisor noted that he called on boys more than girls. This led him to develop a strategy of calling on students that would equalize this, a strategy that he continued into his first year of teaching.

Both Kristie and Jaycee noted that their classes regarding diversity were not particularly good. "I will say, that psychology class was not very well...done," said Jaycee. However, the textbook in Jaycee's class was valuable, and Jaycee recalled learning from it that sometimes girls should be grouped together so that one of them is sure to take on a leadership role.

One sign that participants had not gotten much instruction in equity practices was that few of them understood my question about their preparation to teach for pedagogical equity. After some interpretation by me, many of them seemed to think that it meant giving special or differential treatment to boys and girls. While that was not entirely my intent, many of them reacted to this by emphasizing that they just treat everyone equally. They mostly thought that their intent to do so was enough to make it happen.

Excellent intent, but a lack of tools. These young teachers, on the whole, have progressive views about gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. With the right tools and a bridge from theory to practice, they could effect real change in their schools. Teacher preparation programs need to immerse their students in these tools so that they are prepared to use them in their first year of teaching.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

This feminist, phenomenological study explored the perceptions and experiences of beginning teachers in rural schools regarding gender equity. I designed the study in response to the continuing trend of gender disparities within our schools (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005; Paechter & Clark, 2007) and a relative lack of educational research in rural areas (Teiken, 2014).

In previous chapters, I outlined the need for this study, a review of the relevant literature, and the study's methodology. I then explored my data from the perspective of a rural environment and from the perspective of gender equity issues. In this chapter, I summarize the study and the findings. I then discuss and further interpret the meaning of these findings. Next, I relate that discussion to the body of literature and point to potential areas of future research.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experience of beginning teachers in rural schools. In particular, I was interested in their perceptions of gender equity in the context of a rural environment. This particular intersection is significant because girls in rural areas have been shown to have lower self-esteem than boys in rural areas (Puskar et al., 2010). My research question was:

How do beginning teachers perceive gender equity issues in the rural secondary classroom? And, subsequently,

- How do these teachers characterize the gender dynamics in the secondary classroom?

- How do they perceive their roles as teachers with regards to achieving gender equity in the classroom?
- What are their perceptions of their preparation to teach for gender equity?
- What are their perceptions of their preparation to teach in rural areas?
- How do they characterize rural teaching?

This study was a phenomenological study with a feminist theoretical framework. In designing it this way, I hoped to lift up the voices of my participants while still viewing my data with a critical eye. I felt that the best way to understand these teachers' experiences was to interview them.

Participants were recruited by criterion sampling as described in Creswell (2013). All ten participants were first-year teachers in schools located in towns with populations smaller than 5,000. They were located in two different states in the Midwest over an area that spanned 200 miles. I interviewed nine of the participants twice and one participant once.

After transcribing all interviews, I used descriptive coding and, separately, values coding to code the data, find themes and to develop an understanding of both their common, and in some cases, unique, experiences.

Summary of Findings with Interpretation

Participant dispositions conflicted with participant actions. The main goal of this research was to understand how participants characterized gender equity issues in the rural classroom. I found that participants were very committed to the success of their students. They also emphasized positive relationships as the most important value of their teaching. However, they largely did not implement gender equity practices in their classrooms, even though they were clearly dispositionally disposed to do so.

The importance of community. In response to the research question about how participants characterize rural teaching, one common thread that all teachers noted was community. There was the town community, the school community, the classroom community, and the faculty community. In each of these cases, community, and particularly a small community, was important. Within that, I found two major themes: Benefits and Challenges of being in a small rural community. These themes responded to the research question asking how participants characterize rural teaching.

Participants found several challenges to teaching in a small, rural community. The workload was very high, due to the need to fulfill many roles in the community. This manifested itself in the form of multiple preps and commitments to extra-curricular activities. Even if not directly responsible for activities, beginning teachers often attended them. It was clear that each teacher, even a new one, had important roles in the rural community and was needed for those particular roles.

Participants also frequently lost time to the driving distance from their schools. This was clearly a bigger burden for some, like Robyn and Sara, who had a considerable distance to drive. Participants such as Chad and Don had positions in or near their hometowns, so they were much less affected by the distance. Moving closer to school was something that some participants considered; however, they worried about having social connections and things to do.

Schools also varied in resources; sometimes, participants found themselves in schools with less technology, or less advanced technology, than their preparation had anticipated. This variation in resources also often included smaller departments. Rarely did a participant have a colleague who taught the exact same classes with whom to collaborate. This lack of resources required participants to, themselves, be resourceful. While this took time, it also really helped

them develop a repertoire of skills and plans that they could use in the future. In fact the one teacher who was given plans from other teachers, Julia, felt that she wasn't "teaching anything, or like, that they're learning anything." It is possible that she was not invested in those plans, whereas other teachers, who were forced to create their plans, were.

Participants also perceived, on the whole, that their rural students were less well-prepared and less motivated than perhaps students in suburban or urban areas. Some of this was attributed to teacher turnover. In other cases, it was attributed to the traditions of the community, which included attaining local jobs that mostly did not require a college education.

Finally, most participants were new to their communities and had to learn how to fit into them. They saw their communities as ones in which word gets around quickly. This ranged from understanding the culture of classroom management, to understanding which activities were important, to relating with administration. This was successful for most, but not all, participants. Connecting with other first-year teachers and attending school events seemed to be keys to this success.

All of these combined to make for a difficult first year. In eight out of ten cases, however, the benefits of a rural community outweighed the challenges, and participants planned to stay. Relationships were the source of these benefits. Participants found that they could build better relationships than in other environments, such as those where they student taught. These relationships were with students, parents, and colleagues.

Participants particularly appreciated their relationships with students. This was the most common value found in values coding. Participants pointed to small class sizes as reasons for these good relationships. Many participants also had some students in more than one class because they taught multiple preps. This allowed them to see students at least twice a day.

Participants attributed their ability to connect with parents to high parent involvement. Parents attended sports activities. They also were communicative. Participants mostly found their fellow teachers and administration to be very helpful and supportive. This was not always the case; in Sara's school, the new teachers and veteran teachers had some sort of conflict and spent lunch in two different groups. Kristie felt outright hostility from her administration. However, most participants received help and guidance from the faculty at their schools. Most also had connected with other new teachers as a source of mutual support.

Boys struggle; girls achieve. In response to the research question about gender dynamics, I found Student Behavior and Academics as themes. Most participants found differences between girls and boys in both areas, although they did not usually see these differences as major. With the notable exception of Family and Consumer Sciences, their male students seemed to struggle more both behaviorally and academically. Males also were more likely to be enrolled in remedial classes, and females were more likely to be enrolled in honors courses. Participants mainly attributed these differences to motivation; they felt their male students were as capable of their female students.

Teaching for gender equity not a priority. An important research question in this study was how beginning teachers see their roles in terms of attaining gender equity in their classrooms. The data pointed to gender-blind practices by both participants and schools in most cases. Chad's statement that "I feel like each one's treated just as fair as another" was a common sentiment among participants. Treating everyone equally, from calling on any student whose hand was raised to offering as many sports to girls as boys was seen as enough to create an environment of gender equity. In fact, in some cases, participants implied that these equal practices were unfair for boys.

Participants shared some counter-examples, but the differences were usually downplayed as minor. Troy felt he had to be more distant from girls because of “what goes on now.” However, he did not think it made his connections with girls “a less sincere relationship.” Sara felt that she could relate better to girls than to boys.

Participants largely regarded teaching for gender equity to mean occasionally representing women in curriculum and treating students equally. Many of them expressed that they had not done anything in particular to teach for gender equity. Overwhelm with work was one reason for this. Another reason was a desire to avoid topics that they noted could cause conflict. Additionally, participants did not perceive that their students were facing any sort of differential oppression due to gender or, in most cases, gender identity or LGBTQ status.

Most participants did not recognize Institutional Sexism and Heterosexism in their schools. However, most also had examples that showed the prevalence of both, and these arose as themes throughout the study. Examples included inequitable timing of sporting events and biased dress code practices. There were also examples of harassment towards girls from boys. Finally, there was evidence that LGBTQ students did not feel safe at their schools, and many of the schools did not have elements such as a gay/straight alliance in place to help these students feel safe. While there was evidence of this institutional discrimination, evidence which came from participants, they still described their schools as fair places.

The role of teacher preparation. When learning from my participants both about being rural teachers and about gender equity in their schools, I specifically wanted to understand how their teacher preparation programs had prepared them. In response to my research questions about how participants perceived their preparation to teach for gender equity and to teach in rural areas, I found that neither of these had been emphasized. Some participants had encountered

some education for teaching in rural areas. Generally, this happened as a result of being in a rural field placement. Many participants were themselves from a rural area, and found that to be the best preparation for them. However, some participants encountered surprises or obstacles, such as word getting around quickly or a lack of support for progressive practices. Most also had some coursework regarding gender equity, which was almost entirely theoretical and limited to a small part of a single course. There was evidence that teacher preparation programs did not provide sustained practice in either realm and certainly not in the intersection of the two.

Participant values. After coding the data descriptively, I re-coded the data using values coding. I did not have a research question that related to participant values. However, after working extensively with the data, a new question arose. Since participants did not prioritize gender equity, what did they value instead? In particular, I was interested in the answer to this question because most participants appeared to have been well-prepared in many areas of teaching. From their accounts, even though they were honest about their shortcomings, each participant seemed to be providing a classroom in which students would grow.

When I themed the values data, I found that participants' highest value was connections with students, and their ability to get to know students as individuals. Participants also mentioned critical thinking; they wanted their students to entertain alternative viewpoints and look critically at material. The third value that I found was that participants really wanted their students to be prepared for a successful future. All three of these values aligned with teaching for gender equity. The question remains, then: why isn't this happening in most of their classrooms?

Discussion

The beginning teachers in my study largely enjoyed teaching in their rural schools. They also clearly showed that they valued every student, regardless of gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. As a result of both their intent and their unique position, they have the potential to effect change regarding gender equity in rural schools. However, it is also possible that they will usher in a “soft” version of gender equity that includes a gender-blind view and a sense that institutions are fair regarding gender, similar to what Messner (2011) describes in youth sports. This view could become entrenched, as it appears progressive and equitable on the surface. It is clear that beginning teachers lack the tools to critically examine their environments for gender equity and to respond in ways that are effective in their rural communities.

Gender bias in a rural community. Sexism is pervasive in today’s culture; it is often disguised as feminism but adheres to an image of women as simultaneously liberated and objectified (Douglas, 2010). Schools have not escaped this dual, more modern view. Girls are being told they can have everything. At the same time, they are being treated differently than boys (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005; Robinson-Cimpian et al., 2014). Rural areas are not immune to this problem. Since rural schools have higher teacher turnover than other schools do (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012), beginning teachers could have an important impact on their schools regarding gender equity.

Although they generally reported an equitable environment, participants provided multiple examples of practices or events that discriminated against girls. One of the most prominent of these was dress code. Girls seemed to be more likely to be targeted by dress code rules and to be punished for dress code violations than their male counterparts, according to participants. Even when boys violated the dress code, participants noted that they did not get the

consequences that girls did. This speaks to a wider idea of girls being responsible for not only their own, but also their male peers' sexuality (Rahimi & Liston, 2009). This burden, while unspoken and most likely unrecognized, can only serve to place another weight on girls as well as to reinforce the fine line that they tread between being too chaste and too sexual.

Athletics is another area that disadvantages girls in ways that appear to be invisible to participants and perhaps to their schools. Participants appreciated the high level of participation of all students in sports. However, many of them noted when asked that prime time, cheerleaders, and bands were reserved for boys. This seemed so normal to some participants that they indicated not having thought about it before. They lacked the tools to critically examine institutionalized sexism and entrenched hegemony.

In a school where changes had been made to provide the band or cheerleaders to girls' sports, the boys' team, and a male coach of a girls' team, were upset. They saw an equalizing move as unfair to boys as well as harmful to girls. Although it might seem obvious from a distance that this is not the case, it is not uncommon for a dominant group to feel oppressed when forced to share their privilege. Privileged groups have the resources to define reality such that what appears to be true is defined by those groups. This thinking is also absorbed by subordinate groups, so they often view their treatment as actually helpful to them (Goodman, 2015). The problem of sexism does not lie with individual men. It is a pervasive idea that is promulgated by all of us (hooks, 2015).

Since participants shared that sports are so important to rural communities, gender equity in sport is doubly important in rural schools. Getting past the hegemonic idea that a sharing of resources such as prime time will be difficult, due to the pervasive ideas about privileged groups

(Goodman, 2015). However, it is necessary, and it will most likely be up to new teachers to take on this challenge as they continue in their rural schools.

Participants also reported, in most cases, a hostile environment and lack of support for students who identify as LGBTQ. This is problematic in its own right and it also impacts all students. For example, an environment in which it is not okay to be gay puts pressure on boys to perform their masculinity in more extreme ways. This can result in not trying to do well academically and avoiding shows of emotion (Heinrich, 2013).

Teaching in a rural school: Understanding the community. Rural schools, which serve a fifth of our K-12 student population (Graham, 2009; Blanks et al., 2013), face challenges in retaining teachers (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012, Azano & Stewart, 2016). They tend to have more beginning teachers than urban schools (Gagnon, 2016). Teacher preparation programs do not always provide robust preparation for rural areas (Burton & Johnson, 2010). Since being a first-year teacher is often difficult (Caires, Almeida, & Martins, 2010), beginning teachers need to be better prepared by their preparation programs for rural schools, and once they arrive, they need to be supported by their administration.

The majority of participants enjoyed teaching in a rural environment. They found their connections to students and communities to be valuable. They enjoyed small class sizes and perceived that they encountered fewer classroom management issues than they would in other schools. Many of them felt supported by the community.

However, many of them had experiences that illustrated a struggle to understand and fit in. For example, Sara's experience of being cut off from seasoned teachers, while mitigated by her relationship with two other new teachers, was clearly stressful for her. Jaycee's experience of having to change her classroom management expectations was not something she had

anticipated. Julia's experience with boys who called her "teacher lady" was an unpleasant and ongoing struggle.

These are problems that are difficult for beginning teachers to solve alone. The support of administrators would be helpful in these situations. A clear outline of classroom management standards for the school might have helped Jaycee. Facilitation of conflict resolution, or prior staff team-building, might have allowed Sara and her older colleagues to overcome whatever incident occurred that split them apart. A discussion of how young, female teachers can expect support in the case of push-back by high school boys might have reassured Hope and Julia, both of whom encountered experiences fraught with gender and power dynamics with some male students.

Rural schools are often subject to deficit thinking (Azano & Stewart, 2016). Certainly, many participants indicated deficit thinking about their students' motivation and readiness. Interestingly, the ideas about readiness contrast with standardized test scores, which show that rural students are better prepared than their urban peers (Beck & Shoffstall, 2005). It is possible is that participants perceived a lack of readiness simply because of deficit thinking, part of a natural progression for teachers, who tend to have been highly motivated students themselves. Additionally, they might not have an understanding of the stereotype threat that their students face as rural learners (Azano & Stewart, 2016).

Although they are better prepared according to standardized tests, rural students are less likely to go to college than other students in the United States (Marcus & Krupnick, 2017). It may be this trend that contributes to the perceived lack of motivation in these students. High participation in clubs such as Future Farmers of America (FFA), which nearly all participants

reported to be the case with all genders, might have indicated that students' motivations were based in learning about specific fields that they see around them.

This speaks to the issue of participants gaining an understanding of their rural communities. Beginning teachers might find their students to be more motivated if they engage in place-based education, a key strategy in rural areas (Avery, 2013; Azano & Stewart, 2016). Place-based education values students' knowledge of the local area and employs the local environment in engaging and educating learners (Avery, 2013). Potentially, a tie between academics and students' vision of the future would engage students and increase their motivation.

Teacher education programs. Teacher preparation programs are generally housed within institutions that resist change. Additionally, accreditation requirements concerning multicultural education are not rigorous, and they fail to recognize the place of hegemony in multicultural issues (Vavrus, 2010). As a result, it is perhaps not surprising that teacher education has tended to put multicultural education in one or two courses rather than across the curriculum. The outcome, in terms of my participants, has been well-meaning teachers who are interested in the success of all of their students, including female and LGBTQ students. This is an excellent step. Unfortunately, intent, while admirable, does not in itself compose an equitable environment.

The participants in this study were not prepared in an integrated way, from theory to practice, to provide an equitable environment. Only one participant, Kyle, had received instruction on gender equity in both the classroom and his field placement. In addition to classroom instruction, his field supervisor noted that boys were getting more opportunities to speak in his class, and mentioned this to him. As a result, Kyle had developed a systematic way

of calling on students so that all of them were heard. Kyle cared about the success of his female students as much as that of his male students. What he needed was the ability to see the unseen bias in his secondary classroom.

Teaching for equity. Teaching for gender equity requires a disposition towards finding bias, a commitment to pedagogical practices that enable equal participation, and the incorporation of girls and women into the curriculum. This is difficult to do, considering that subconscious bias is part of the hegemonic norm. However, it is essential for a just classroom.

Social justice education requires, among other things, an understanding of the concept of equity. Equity recognizes that equality of opportunity is not necessarily enough to counterbalance hegemonic oppression. The concept of gender equity recognizes that girls face bias regularly. They see less of themselves in sports media (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). They are more likely to be note-takers rather than experimenters in group projects in the classroom. Their teachers reinforce the idea that their successes are due to luck and, when they don't do well, it is because a lack of ability (Sadker & Zittleman, 2005). Equity practices confront this bias.

What does it mean, then, to teach for gender equity? A key piece of teaching for equity is to genuinely and visibly care about students. When students know that teachers are invested in them, they are more able to take risks (Goodman, 2011). However, teaching for equity goes beyond care. It includes a critical consciousness. It also includes a commitment to pedagogical practices that encourage everyone's voice. Finally, it includes the implementation of curriculum, both formal and hidden, that represents the diversity of the world in which we live.

Participants in this study clearly cared about their students. However, most of them did not report that they engaged in gender equity practices other than care. Many felt that they

treated all students the same; when asked about pedagogical practices for equity, they were unclear about what those might be.

Participants who did share that they treated girls differently than boys generally thought they had a better understanding of students of their own gender. These young teachers were likely to remember their own high school experiences and to surmise that students of their gender were experiencing similar things. It may be that female teachers can relate to female students more and that male teachers can better relate to male students.

Many participants were aware that it was good practice to incorporate examples of women and people who identify as LGBTQ in the curriculum. As first-year teachers, they generally relied on their textbooks and other formal curriculum to provide these examples. Robyn and Kristie intentionally included information about LGBTQ families and women in science, respectively. The workload of being a first-year teacher in a rural school precluded many participants from getting to this issue, because it simply was not high enough on the priority list.

Participants reported a relatively short theoretical section concerning gender equity in their teacher preparation programs. Only Kyle recalled the experience of having this instruction in his practical experience. Troy specifically noted that he was never asked to put equity theory into practice, and mused whether that was why he was not using that theory in his classroom.

Participants also generally did not exhibit an ability to critically assess their students' school environment. Most participants thought that their schools treated students equally. However, when asked about specific resources, they revealed that this was not true. Unequal resources came up most in conversations about dress code and sports, both very visible elements of school life. It may be that sports and clothing guidelines are more inequitable than most

school experiences. Conversely, sports and dress code may also be an indicator that less visible experiences and resources are equally sexist and have yet to be uncovered.

The participants in my study universally expressed a desire for gender equity in their classes and schools. In most cases, they felt that both they and their schools accomplished this. However, the literature clearly shows that girls face teacher and institutional bias regularly (Rahimi & Liston, 2009; Carlone, Johnson, & Scott, 2015; Robinson-Cimpian et al., 2014; Nürnberger et al., 2016). Educators often do not notice this bias (Towery, 2007). The feminist movement has failed to integrate itself into most of society; it remains as the property of privileged women (hooks, 2015). As a result, beginning teachers have not learned feminist teaching practices. These teachers need to be prepared to see the unseen, and then to address it.

What We Need to do to Teach Beginning Teachers How to Teach for Gender Equity in Rural Schools: Infused, From Theory to Practice

Many of my participants thought that equal treatment was equitable treatment. The case is not so much that this is incorrect; rather, it results in three main problems. Teachers often do not realize they are not actually treating students equally. The equal treatment we offer was developed in a world in which the male identity was the norm. Finally, helping ourselves and our students to develop a critical lens is a key part of finding hidden inequity.

We are often not actually treating students equally. Beginning teachers need to understand that good intent does not necessarily result in equal treatment (Towery, 2007). They need to be taught about subconscious unequal treatment as outlined in work such as that by Sadker & Zittleman (2005). They should also learn about tools that can help them analyze their own classroom practices, such as videotaping a class session and tallying and/or timing different genders' talking time as well as interaction time with the teacher.

The equal treatment we do offer was developed in a heteronormative, male-dominated world. One example of this is the way we call on students. Taking answers immediately after asking questions results in more interactions with males and also limits the time for all involved to consider the question. Teachers need to be taught about wait time, which often evens out the types of students who respond (Sadker & Koch, 2016). They should also engage in cold calling, the strategy of calling on a student who has not volunteered to answer. This strategy has been shown to increase voluntary participation of all students and to make students more comfortable about being a part of classroom discussions (Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2012)

Helping ourselves and our students to develop a critical lens. Student teachers should be taught to look critically at their environments. One place to start is the walls of the classroom (Sadker & Koch, 2016). Taking a close look at representation, and who is being shown doing what, might reveal some hidden curriculum about what boys and girls can or should do. Student teachers should also learn how to look at technology critically so that they can teach their own students to do the same. This will help students to note when media are reinforcing stereotypes or otherwise sending gendered messages (Sadker & Koch, 2016).

Teachers also need to develop a critical lens around LGBTQ issues. My participants were dispositionally disposed to help their students who identified as LGBTQ. However, they did not have the skills to see the depth of the issues these students faced, nor the skills to intervene. This mismatch of inclination and skills has been found in the literature before (Milburn & Palladino, 2012).

Integrating the above practices in both theory and practice in teacher education. Teacher candidates need to see evidence of systemic bias, learn how to critically look at teaching

and other school practices, and learn the strategies above. They then need to apply this information in practice and reflection. Limiting conversations about gender equity to one part of one course, in the experiences of my participants, was not enough. This makes sense; teaching for equity is not a compartmentalized practice. When infused throughout theoretical learning, practice, and reflection, equity practices become part of the act of teaching.

Discussion in Relation to the Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine the nexus of three concepts: that of being a rural teacher, that of being a first-year teacher, and that of teaching for gender equity. As noted in the literature review, this combination was lacking in the literature. By focusing on these three things, I hoped to attain a sum that was greater than simply an addition of the three parts.

This study also bridges three areas of the literature that do not regularly overlap. Authors such as Azano and Stewart (2015), Blanks et al (2013), Eppley (2015), Kaden, Patterson, and Healy (2014), Kline and Walker-Gibbs (2015), and others have all studied teacher education in rural communities. These studies addressed both the concept of being a rural teacher and being a novice teacher. They identified many stresses involved with teaching in a rural community, as well as multiple positive experiences. The challenge of multiple preps is identified often as a difficult obstacle for beginning teachers (Smeaton & Waters, 2013; Hellsten, McIntyre, & Prytula, 2011); this was certainly mirrored in the experiences of participants in the current study. There is also documentation of the idea of students being known in a rural school (Eppley, 2015). My participants also reported this phenomenon and valued it highly.

The body of literature also addresses issues of gender equity in schools. This includes Sadker and Koch (2016) as well as several other authors. Unlike the current study, few of these articles also refer to beginning teachers.

The existing literature has informed and supported this study. By looking at the intersection of the three concepts of gender equity, rural teaching, and beginning teachers, this study builds on previous work to identify a specific need. This need is for teachers to be prepared to teach for gender equity in rural environments, which have unique challenges and opportunities.

Future Research

This study involved participants in a 200-mile diameter of area in the Midwest, and incorporated teachers of different genders from multiple subject areas. However, it had several limitations and certainly points to the need for future studies. These future studies should span multiple types of research, such as those highlighted in the literature review. Critical theorist work, postmodern work, pragmatist work, and postpositivist work can all be informed by this feminist, phenomenological study.

Critical theorist researchers might be interested in further investigating the themes found in the current study. In particular, critical theorists might wish to problematize the ideas of equality and equity in terms of gender in rural schools. Future critical theorist studies could involve student interviews or classroom observations.

Postmodern researchers value language and discourse. In relation to this study, postmodern researchers would value observations of preservice classrooms, especially those that involve discussion. Researchers such as Azano and Stewart (2016) noted deficit thinking in student teachers; similar work regarding gender equity and student teachers would add substantially to the literature. Brillhart's (2010) concept of the black box, which is not entirely clear to a researcher or a teacher candidate but contains the essence of the issue at hand, is metaphor that could be applied to a beginning rural teacher's relationship to gender equity. This

relationship can be conceptualized as inherently unknowable from two different perspectives but important to K-12 students' futures nonetheless.

Qualitative pragmatist researchers have provided evidence that intending to treat everyone equally is not effective (Lundeberg, 1997). These researchers often implement strategies such as videotaping or conducting professional development sessions and document results. An implementation of teaching gender equity strategies from theory to practice in a teacher preparation program and gaging results is a future study that would be very relevant to this area of research.

Empiricist research also has a very important place in research about gender equity in rural schools. While some feminists critique the value of empiricist research because of the inherent lack of context, others find it helpful to document empirical evidence (McHugh, 2014). Empiricist research would benefit from recent studies of male and female participation in rural classrooms, especially those taught by beginning teachers. Another future area of study could involve survey research about beginning teachers' attitudes and levels of implementation. Quantitative work discerning the percentages of schools that give girls' and boys' sports equal resources such as the band would also help more completely paint the picture of gender equity in the literature.

As a feminist researcher who is interested in gender equity in secondary schools, I anticipate the potential of using many of these types of research, but align myself most with pragmatist work. I am a teacher educator, a practitioner, who is committed to helping my students learn to teach for gender equity. Therefore, I anticipate that I will continue to contribute to the literature through studies of what is as well as how to best help beginning teachers enact what can be.

Conclusion

“Before women could change patriarchy we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness” (hooks, 2015, p. 7). While, certainly, I encountered some essentialist beliefs and some sexism during this study, my participants universally expressed the belief that girls and boys are equally capable and the desire to serve all students equally. However, they did not have the tools to provide an equitable environment. As hooks (2015) points out, consciousness-raising is an essential element to changing hegemonic influences. This will require a sustained effort by teacher educators, especially those whose students will be teaching in a rural environment.

Teaching in a rural community has multiple benefits. It also offers many obstacles. As a result, it is difficult for beginning teachers to enact their dispositions towards gender equity. They need specific, sustained preparation in these areas. This preparation needs to be infused throughout their teacher preparation programs and ideally, reinforced in professional development offered in the schools in which they work.

Feminism needs to find a way to reach beyond its current circle and to help all of society develop critical consciousness (hooks, 2015). One way to do that, of course, is through education. This is why it is imperative that beginning teachers are well-prepared to teach for gender equity. Teacher prep programs would serve rural communities well by incorporating education to implement gender equity strategies in both theory and practice so that new teachers are able to implement these concepts well in a rural environment.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Name of Study: Listening to Beginning Teachers: Gender in the Rural Secondary School
Principal Investigator: Rebekah Dimick Eastman

Recruitment Email

Hello _____,

This is Becky Dimick Eastman, currently a doctoral student studying at Ball State University.

I am contacting you because I am engaging in a research study, and I hope you will be interested in participating. The purpose of my study is to understand the experiences of beginning teachers in rural schools, specifically concerning gender. The title of the study is "Listening to Beginning Teachers: Gender in the Rural Secondary School."

For this study, I will be interviewing teachers two or more times. In order to be eligible for the study, you need to be a secondary preservice (student) teacher or a first-year teacher.

I recognize that your time, as a teacher, is very valuable. If you are interested, take a look at the attached informed consent form and let me know if you are willing to participate.

You are welcome to call or email me with any questions. My phone number is 765 977 8609 and my email address is rdimickeastm@bsu.edu.

Thank you!

Becky

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Study Title Gender Equity in the Rural Secondary Classroom: The Experience of Beginning Teachers

Principal Investigator: Rebekah Dimick Eastman

Study Purpose and Rationale

This study's purpose is to understand the perceptions and experiences of beginning teachers in rural schools regarding gender issues.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Eligibility to be a participant in this study requires that you must be a beginning teacher between age 20 and age 99. Beginning teacher is defined as preservice (during the school year of student teaching) or a first-year practicing teacher. You must also be a teacher at a rural school. Rural is defined as in a town with a population under 5,000 (or, in an unincorporated area), although the school might draw students from a wider population than 5,000.

Participation Procedures and Duration

If you agree to be a participant, you will be asked to participate in one-two interviews with the Principal Investigator. Interviews will last 45 minutes to an hour and will be held at a location that is mutually convenient for the participant and the principal investigator. The Principal Investigator is Rebekah Dimick Eastman.

Audio Recordings

Given your permission and with the intent of keeping accurate data, the Principal Investigator will record interviews using a recording application on the Principal Investigator's cell phone. The cell phone is password protected. Interviews will be then transcribed onto the principal investigator's laptop computer, which is also password protected, and the original recordings will then be destroyed. Transcripts will use pseudonyms instead of real names, and any other identifying information (name of school, location, etc.) will also be changed to pseudonyms in the transcription. The Principal Investigator may take field notes during and after the interview. These notes will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Principal Investigator's office when handwritten or on a password-protected laptop when typed. All data gathered throughout the research will be deleted and destroyed by December 2022.

Data Confidentiality

All data collected in this study will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of real names or locations, and personally identifying information will not appear in resulting presentations or papers. All information that is personally identifying will be kept in a locked cabinet or on a password-protected phone or laptop.

Storage of Data

The data collected in this study includes: audio recordings, written transcripts of the audio recordings, field notes, and data analysis documents, including narratives and theme development. Audio recordings will be stored on a password-protected phone and destroyed

once transcribed. Only the Principal Investigator will have access to audio recordings. Transcriptions of interviews, typed field notes, and data analysis will be kept on a password-protected laptop belonging to the Principal Investigator, and any hard copies will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Principal Investigator's office.

Risks or Discomforts

The only anticipated potential risk and/or discomfort that you may encounter as a result of this study is the possibility that you may be uncomfortable discussing certain topics or answering certain questions. In response to any question, at any point in time, you may refuse to answer. Additionally, you may withdraw from the study at any point without incurring any penalty.

Benefit

No direct benefits are anticipated as a result of participation in this study.

Compensation

Participation in this study will not result in any compensation.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you should feel free to withdraw from the study for any reason and at any time, without prejudice or penalty from the Principal Investigator. You also should feel welcome to ask the Principal Investigator any questions you may have at any time during the study, including before signing this form.

IRB Contact Information

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research, please feel free to contact the Director, Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070 or at irb@bsu.edu.

Study Title

Gender Equity in the Rural Secondary Classroom: The Experience of Beginning Teachers

Principal Investigator: Rebekah Dimick Eastman

Consent

I, _____, agree to be a participant in the research project "Gender Equity in the Rural Secondary Classroom: The Experience of Beginning Teachers." The study has been explained to me and any questions I have had have been answered. It is my understanding that I am eligible to participate based on the eligibility information above. I understand the description above and consent to be a participant.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher Contact Information**Researcher:**

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Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Study: Gender Equity in the Rural Secondary Classroom: The Experience of Beginning Teachers

Date and time of interview: _____

Location of interview: _____

Opening: Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. The goal of this interview is to understand your experience and thoughts regarding gender issues in your classroom and school. As mentioned in the informed consent form, you can refuse to answer any question and stop the interview at any time.

Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about your school.
2. Describe some elements about teaching at a rural school that might be different from teaching in an urban or suburban school.
3. Have you noticed differences between girls and boys in your classroom in terms of behavior?
4. Have you noticed differences between girls and boys in your classroom academically?
5. Do you think that you treat girls and boys differently? If so, in what ways?
6. Do you think that your school treats girls and boys equitably? Why or why not?
7. How would you describe the dress code at your school?
 - a. What do you, other faculty, and administrators do about enforcing this?
 - b. What are the most common dress code violations?
8. What types of extra curricular activities would you say are popular or typical at your school?
 - a. What types of extra curricular activities are more popular for girls?
 - b. What types of extra curricular activities are more popular for boys?
9. Would you say that you try to teach for gender equity in your pedagogical practices? If so, how?
10. Would you say that you try to incorporate content and curriculum that break down gender stereotypes? Could you give examples?
11. Would you say that your preservice preparation program includes/included gender equity issues or strategies?
12. How well prepared do you feel to teach for gender equity?
13. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

Appendix D: Themes Tables

Descriptive Coding

Thesis	Argument	Themes	Categories
Beginning teachers are relatively progressive and would like to create an equitable environment. However, given the challenges of teaching in a rural community and the lack of tools they have for fitting in while still noticing and addressing gender equity issues, they will not be prepared to do so and may perpetuate a gender-blind environment. Teacher preparation programs need to teach these tools throughout, in both theory and practice, to best support rural schools in education for gender equity.	Community was a large factor in beginning teachers' ability to succeed	Challenges	Workload
			Distance
			Resources
			Student Readiness and Motivation
			Fitting in
		Benefits	Relationships with Students
			Relationships with Parents
			Relationships with colleagues
	Beginning teachers have the dispositions but need the tools to notice and address gender equity issues	Teacher preparation	Teacher preparation for a rural environment
		Student behavior	The compliant buffer
			Victims of harassment
		Academics	Academic differences
		Teaching for gender equity	Gender blindness
			Content for equity
			Pedagogy for equity
		Institutional sexism and heterosexism	Dress Code
			Sports
			LBGTQ
		Teacher preparation	Teacher preparation for gender equity

Values Coding

Argument	Theme
Teachers cared about each student as an individual, regardless of gender and other attributes	Student connection, getting to know students, student relationships
Teachers wanted their students to be able to consider various viewpoints	Critical thinking
Future success for students, with specific content as secondary	Students being prepared for life after school